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*A WAYSIDE*

*NOVEL*

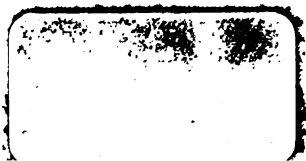


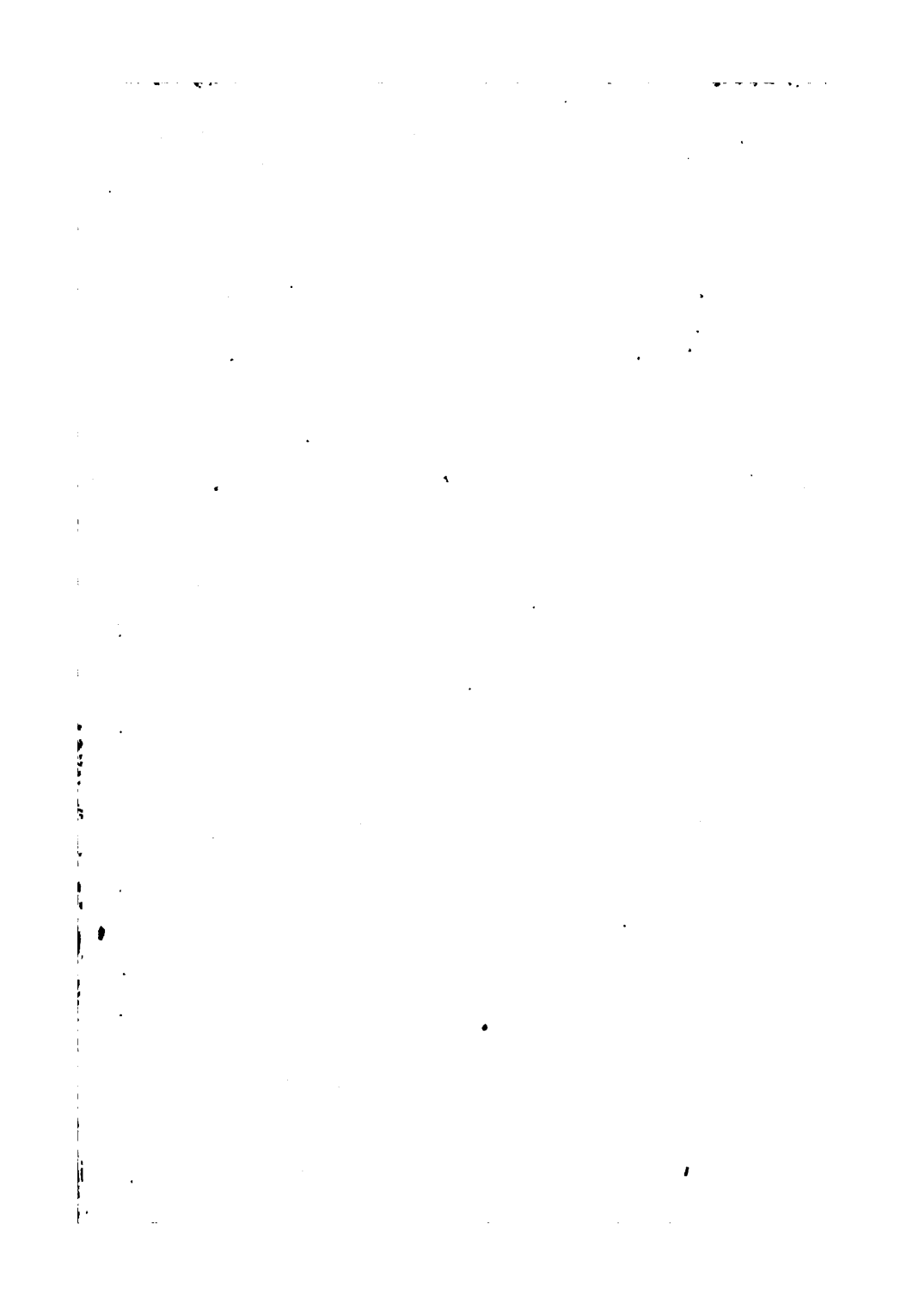
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"A NEST OF SPARROWS."

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"Sat down to smoke his pipe, while Paul strolled hither and thither collecting rustic fuel, to keep the flames bright and red."—Page 219.

A

# WAYSIDE SNOWDROP

BY

M. E. WINCHESTER

AUTHOR OF

'A NEST OF SPARROWS,' 'UNDER THE SHIELD,'  
'CHIRPS FOR THE CHICKS'

'For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying: Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.'

DEUTERONOMY XV. 11.

'To walk together to the kirk,  
And all together pray,  
While each to his great Father bends,  
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
And youths and maidens gay!

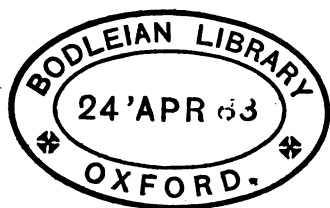
\* \* \* \* \*  
He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God, who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.'

COLERIDGE—*Ancient Mariner.*

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET  
LONDON. MDCCCLXXXIII

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IN 'A Wayside Snowdrop,' as in 'A Nest of Sparrows,' it has been thought undesirable to reproduce with accuracy the pronunciation and phraseology of those whose simple history is thus brought before our young readers.

M. E. W.

To  
MY GODCHILD,  
EVELYN A. S. GEM,  
THIS LITTLE STORY  
Is Affectionately Dedicated.

# A WAYSIDE SNOWDROP.



## CHAPTER I.

'And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.'—1 JOHN v. 14.

It was a dark, cold evening in the first week of December. The snow was lying thick and black with the tread of busy hurrying feet, and a heavy fog lay over the great city, in one of the squalid corners of which this little story opens. In one of the squalid corners? Alas, yes; in one of those wretched courts, so common to every great city, from which the favoured children of wealth would turn aside as from some loathsome den—one of those sin-blighted, poverty-stricken alleys where comfort is unknown, where peace never reigns, and where dirt, ignorance, and crime hold the wretched inhabitants in an iron bondage of reckless misery.

The small top room, then, of a house standing in one of the narrowest, most built-up of these courts, was the spot where the first scene of this simple history was enacted, some few years gone by. That little room did indeed bear sad signs of the direst poverty. It was lighted by a four-paned window, of which two were broken and stuffed with rags. Ceiling and walls were stained with the grime of years. Furniture—there was none. A kettle with no lid and only half a handle was singing loudly on the fire in the little rusty grate; and on the mantelpiece stood a cracked brown teapot, a blue mug, and a leaden spoon. Drawn as close to the side of the grate as safety would permit, was a heap of rags, straw, and even paper, the whole being covered over with an old sack. This was the bed! And lying here,



clad in threadbare garments, was a woman. A woman? Well, hardly; for this was but the eighteenth winter she had watched drawing nigh. A young girl, a mere child she looked as she lay there; a wasted and wan child, whose features were white and pinched with many a day's suffering and care, and whose flushed cheeks, unnaturally bright eyes, and hacking cough told the sad tale of the grasp of a sore malady.

By her side, carefully rolled in a faded red shawl, was a small delicate-looking baby boy; and lying stretched at full length before the fire, was a lad of perhaps twelve summers. The girl's eyes were fixed dreamily and sadly upon him. She saw he was fast asleep. She herself had just awoke. There was a heap of coarse work wrapped in a newspaper at the other side of the room. Men's heavy corduroy trousers. There were six pairs of them there; and she had made them all! She had been working night and day at them since Wednesday, and now it was Saturday, and one pocket of the sixth pair was still unfinished. Stiff work for such thin small hands—and all to gain a few shillings; but then those few shillings were to relieve her from a great necessity, so no wonder that she had stitched so hard the last four days. And no wonder, too, that she had thrown herself down by her baby's side when the light of the afternoon wore away, to snatch a few moments' rest. She was *so* tired; and she did so ache. Her eyes ached, her back ached, her poor little fingers ached; and as she had lain there, kind sleep had stolen unawares upon her, and had weighed down her tired eyelids, and brought to her weary brain an hour's sweet forgetfulness of her great need and misery.

An hour! had she been asleep a whole hour? Yes, indeed she had; for there was Charlie, and he never came home before six o'clock. He must have come in while she was sleeping, and, with his usual thoughtfulness, had not disturbed her, but had settled himself quietly before the fire, and had fallen asleep as well. She was not surprised. He had been out since daybreak, poor little fellow, trying to earn halfpennies with his broom in the snow; and he must be very tired. She would not awake him. His work was over for the day, and he could rest. But hers was not. She must stitch that last pocket in, and then carry the six

pairs of trousers home to the shop, before she could feel that her work for that week was done.

So with a sigh she arose, crossed the room, and, returning with the unfinished trousers in her hand, began to stitch as hard as she could. A quarter of an hour passed; then there was a movement under the red shawl. Baby stretched out its little arms, the tiny legs kicked up and down, the wee fists were stuck into the still closed eyes, the small face puckered into threatening wrinkles, a peevish wail broke into a loud cry. Charlie awoke with a start, and ran to his side.

'Now, now, young un!' he cried, snatching him up; 'there, there! Hush, you scamp! will you? Don't wake poor mammy!' Then, as his glance fell on the girl sitting in the light of the fire, he added: 'Hallo, Nelly! so you're awake, and at it again, are you? Ain't those things done yet?'

'They will be in another half-hour, love,' she replied. 'How baby is screaming! Give him to me a minute. He always cries like that when he wakes up.'

'No, no, Nell! You've been worried with him all day. I'll manage him now, first-rate. Look here,' he continued to the howling little one, tossing it gently up and down, 'just stop it, will you? Why, you're worse than a brass band dinning in a fellow's ears like that. Stop it, this minute; and see what Charlie's brought you!'

With that he drew from the pocket of his ragged little jacket half a stick of barley-sugar, which he placed in the tiny hand. Baby crowed with delight, and sucked his falling tears and sugar together.

'He'll be quiet now,' said Charlie; 'I told you I'd manage him. Oh, Nelly! how bad your cough is! I believe it's worse than ever!'

The girl's work had fallen to her lap, and she was coughing painfully. When the paroxysm had passed away, she drew her hand wearily across her eyes, and once more taking up her needle, replied:

'It's sticking so close to *this*, half through the nights, has done it, Charlie. I think I must have taken a bit of fresh cold. I've had a bad pain in my chest this three hours or more; and oh, a *very* bad one in my head.'

'That work is killing you!' cried Charlie; 'and all for four shillings, too! Put it away and rest. It isn't worth it.'

'Not worth it, love!' she replied, as she re-threaded her needle. 'Why, you know, three shillings of it must go to the landlady on Monday morning! We've paid her no rent for four weeks now; and didn't she say she'd wait no longer, but that we must either pay up all we owe or go? That means—die in the streets of cold, you, and baby, and me. Four shillings—oh yes!—it is worth it! It will secure us a shelter, and leave a shilling over for a loaf and a bit of fire, for a few days longer; and who knows what good thing may not happen by then?'

These words, instead of kindling a smile on Charlie's little face, brought a very grave expression to it.

'I know what you mean, Nell,' he said quietly. 'You think that perhaps your sailor-husband may come home to you safe and sound after all, and take you back to the cosy lodgings where he left you when he went away far beyond seas in the *Henry James*. But he *won't*, Nell; don't build upon that, for there's no hope there. You know well that the *Henry James* hasn't been heard of these fourteen months past. Why won't you believe what everyone else believes—that the ship went down, and every soul was lost?'

She gave a slight shriek, and, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples, replied:

'Oh, don't, don't, Charlie; don't say *lost*! The ship may have gone down, love; nay, it must have done, or some tidings would have reached those that own her in all these months. But not the crew, love; not every soul, as you said just now. I can't believe it!—I won't believe it! Men have been saved before from sinking ships; and turned up—ay, years after! It may be so with my William. It *must* be so. I'm praying to the Lord so hard for it; and surely He'll hear me in the end. P'raps He's keeping me waiting to teach me to be patient. I *will* be patient—as patient as He likes!—so that He hears me at last. Oh, if I'd only known the night I bid him good-bye on the quay—if *he'd* only known!—how quickly he'd have turned his back on that ill-fated ship! Only three months married, and to let him go a four months' voyage; and then, never to see him again! What, *never*? Oh no! that couldn't be. I must

be patient—very patient—and the Lord will send him to me yet.' And returning to her work, she stitched more quickly than ever, while Charlie gazed absently and thoughtfully into the fire.

'I know you think the Lord can do everything, Nell,' he observed presently; 'and so, of course, He can. If He made the world, and the stars, and everything else we see around us, I guess it would be mighty difficult to find anything that was too hard for Him. But there's one thing that I don't believe He'd ever do—no, not if you spent five hundred years over praying for it!—and that is, send a drowned man home to no matter who. But never mind, Nell; it only frets you, so I'll say no more about it. We'll talk of something else. You haven't asked me how I got on to-day. I've had rare luck. I've earned a whole shilling, besides an odd penny! One halfpenny bought baby's barley-sugar, and the other's here in my pocket. Thirteenpence! a lot, isn't it? Oh, I got it all honest—quite honest!—don't look so anxious-like. You know what you taught me—"Thou shalt not steal." Do you think I'd forget it, Nell? Do you think I'd do anything that wasn't quite honest, after all you've done for me, and all you've been to me? Ay, I remember *that* night! I often think of it. I was crying with cold and hunger in the dusk of the evening, Nell; when you came passing by. And I saw your purse, that you were carrying loose-like in your hand; and I twitched it sudden from you, and it fell on the pavement. But, stooping all in a hurry to snatch it up, I tripped my foot, and I fell too; and you caught me by the shoulder. What did you do? Did you call the p'lice, as you should have done? Did you box my ears and pass on? No; you listened when I told you I was half dead for want of food and fire; and you led me to your cosy home, and you warmed and fed me, and you never turned me on the street again, dear Nell! and oh, I love you for it!'

'That is near eighteen months ago,' she replied. 'You've grown a good deal since then, love. You looked such a miserable bit of a white chap; and you'd not a friend to give you a bite; and I'd lost a little brother about your age—called Charlie, too!—and I felt I couldn't turn you out again; so I kept you.'

'Ay!' he said, 'you did. And look at all you taught me. To be clean, and honest, and 'spectable; to hold up my head, and look decent folks straight in the face like. I, who'd been reared anyhow, and had kept myself ever since I could remember by snatching at anything I came across! But that's all over, Nelly; don't you be afraid, it's all over! You've teach'd me "Thou shalt not steal," and I'll never forget it—never!'

'I don't believe you will, love,' she said, with a quiet smile. 'You're a good lad, Charlie; and we'll be happy yet, you'll see, if we're only patient and wait.'

He shook his head.

'It takes a lot of *waiting*,' he replied; 'a deal more than I like. But we were very happy once, Nell—you and me together. You had comfortable lodgings then, nicely furnished and all. But it didn't last long. Do you remember that awful day when the gentleman at the office, where you used to go to draw your William's wages, told you that they'd pretty well made up their minds that the ship had gone down, and that they could give you no more money? You fell sick, and all your savings went. And when you were well, you tried to get work, and you couldn't. Then baby was born, and there was three of us to keep. And you were weak and ill, and you wouldn't write to your old father for help, 'cause you said he was poor and had nothing to spare; and you wouldn't go home to him, 'cause you wanted to be going to that office every day to ask if there was news of the *Henry James*. But there never was. And then we got so hard up, that we were glad to come to this bit of a broken-down room for ninepence a week; and that's often more than we can pay.'

'Indeed it is,' she replied, wiping some starting tears from her eyes, 'or we wouldn't have been these four weeks and never paid a halfpenny. But see, Charlie, the flame's died away. I can't see, and this pocket isn't quite done yet. Put baby down by me, dear, and run and buy me a bit of candle.'

He needed no further bidding. A second later he was making his way to a little shop at the end of the street, and in a few minutes he returned.

'It's an awful night,' he said, as he lighted the candle

and placed it near her, stuck in an old ink-bottle for want of a candlestick ; 'the fog is that thick you can't see a thing. You've to feel your way as you go along ; and it's so cold and slippery, too. I fell down twice just in getting out of the court.'

'That's bad for me,' said Nelly, glancing up from her work with a troubled look on her thin flushed face ; 'foggy, cold, and slippery, and I have to take these trousers two miles the other side of the river !'

'You'll never find your way to the quay !' cried Charlie. 'Why, you can't see a yard before you !'

'Oh, I'll manage that,' she replied. 'I'm not afraid of losing myself. I was only wondering if I might get more cold over it ! I feel so poorly to-night ; and I'm so frightened of falling ill.'

'You look strange, somehow !' was Charlie's reply, after a brief survey of her pinched features. 'You have such a red, red spot on each of your cheeks, and your eyes are as bright as bright can be. I never saw you look prettier, Nell ; but there's something strange about you. What is it ?'

'I don't know, dear,' she replied. 'My head aches dreadful bad, and my throat's sore.'

'I don't think you ought to go out to-night,' he observed, after a pause of consideration. 'Let me take the work home for you, Nell.'

'I would, dear, gladly,' she answered, 'but they wouldn't pay you ; you know they wouldn't last time, and we must have the money by Monday morning. The landlady said so positive she wouldn't give us another hour. We mustn't risk being turned into the street, Charlie.'

'No,' he replied ; 'we mustn't. And to-morrow's Sunday, too, we couldn't get the four shillings from the shop then, it would be all shut up ; no more could we get across the river and back in time to have it ready for her on Monday morning. She always comes for her old rent so early. How I hate landladies !'

'We can't expect to get shelter for nothing,' was Nelly's quiet reply.

'Well, no,' he said, 'I suppose we can't. But I wish you hadn't to go out to-night. I'll tell you what I'll do, Nell. I'll buy some more coal and a pint of milk with my

shilling, and I'll have a good fire and a hot drink for you against you get back.'

He was bending over her as he spoke, and letting her work fall impulsively to the ground, she threw her arms round his neck, and rested her head on his shoulder.

'You are such a little fellow, love,' she said. 'You say you're twelve, but you'd pass easy for nine; but oh, Charlie, boy! you might be fifty for the comfort you are to me. What should I do without you, my brave little man? I'm so grateful to you, and I love you so dearly, Charlie—so dearly.'

'Not so much as I love you, Nelly,' he replied, stroking her hot cheek with his little dirty hand. 'You're all I've got to love, except the baby yonder, and I love you all the world, Nell—all the world.'

Her answer was a fond kiss; then whispering that she mustn't waste the time, she released him, and picked up her work. He went over to the baby, who was sitting on the bed all this time contentedly sucking his barley-sugar, and he passed his fingers through his hair, and whistled a quiet tune for him; but he did it absently. It was evident his thoughts were far away. By-and-by he turned towards the girl again, and cried:

'Nelly, you're always saying that I do this for you, and I do that for you; but I don't see that I've ever done anything yet worth speaking about. But that is no reason why I never should. I've been thinking a good deal lately, Nelly, that we may go on for long enough as we're doing now; and what good will come of it? You want to stop near that office, that you may go every now and then to ask if anything has been heard of the *Henry James* and her crew. And to do this, you are wearing your poor fingers to the bone over hard stitching; and I am picking half-pennies together as I can get them; and we are living in a kind of place *you* were never used to; and we often starve with hunger, and we often freeze with cold. That's all very bad.'

'But how could we alter it, Charlie?' she asked, with a deep weary sigh.

'This way,' he replied; 'you just listen while I show you how I've thought it all out straight and nice. You can

make up your mind, if you like, to be patient, and go on praying to the good Lord to send your William home ; but we needn't stay here while we are waiting for him.'

'Oh, I couldn't leave—I couldn't leave!' she cried ; 'all my hope is in that shipping-office ! I keep thinking every time I go I may hear some good news ; and the thought keeps me alive.'

'Well, but, Nelly,' continued Charlie gently, 'if you left word at the office where you'd gone, so that if they *did* hear anything of your William, they could tell him where to find you ; wouldn't that do ?'

'And where would you want to go, love?' she asked.

'Far away from here,' he said. 'The fact is, Nell, I don't see why you should do without a husband while you are waiting for your William to come back to you. And if you'll have *me*, I'll be your husband—till he comes home, I mean, of course. I won't be a very big one, or a very clever one ; but I'll be better than nothing. And I'll work for you, oh, *so* hard ! and the bigger I get, the more I'll work ; and I'll give you every penny I earn. Now what do you say to that ?'

The boy's tone was very earnest. She wouldn't have laughed at him had she been in health and spirits ; but she was feeling too ill and depressed even to care to talk, and her only answer was a quiet smile. It satisfied Charlie.

'Then that's settled,' he said brightly ; 'and now, Nelly, I'll tell you what we'll do. Our baby, here, is coming on first-rate. He'll be walking by spring, and wanting to toddle about ; and this is no kind of a place for him to toddle about in. Why, look at the bad words and ways he'd learn from the rough lot about here ! This is no kind of a home to rear him in ; so we must get out of it. Are you listening, Nell ?'

'Yes, dear,' she said ; 'I was only looking for my cotton. Ah, here it is. Go on.'

'Well then,' he continued, 'this not being at all a fit place to rear the baby, of course we must get out of it. This is what we'll do. We'll go to that lovely lovely place where you were born, and where you lived to the very day when you married your William. Your old father will be rare and glad to see us ; for he must have been so lonely since you left him.



And you'll be able to show me all the things you've told me so much about. There'll be that nest—the red bird's nest. What do you call them?—oh, robins! Yes; the robin's nest in the old pear-tree, growing up the wall just under your bedroom window. I *shall* like to see that. Maybe there'll be little ones in it—all with red breasts; or maybe there'll be eggs, and I shall be able to watch them turn into birds. Then I'll see the garden, with the trees that the fruit grows on; the apples and the plums, and the cherries, and the potatoes, and all the things in the greengrocers' shops, except the oranges, that you told me came from foreign parts. And I'll sit on the bough of the old oak-tree where you used to learn your lessons when you were little like me. And p'raps I'll tumble out and hurt my foot like you did; but I don't think I will, for I'll stick mighty fast. And we'll go to the wood, and get the wild-flowers. And we'll sit on the stile where you and your William sat that evening when he told you he'd have to go one more voyage before he left the sea for good; and we'll watch the larks rising out of the corn, as you did. And I'll toss the hay, and bring the cows home at milking-time, and clean the shippin and the pigsties; and learn to work, just as your little brother—the Charlie that died, you know—used to work. Only I'll do far more than him, for I am not weak and sickly like he was; I am strong—very strong. And then, Nell, on a Sunday we'll go to the old church. We'll hear the children sing; and you'll show me the place where you used to sit amongst them (not so many years ago), and the big stone basin for the water where you were christened. And then, Nelly, the baby will grow a real splendid lad; and he'll go to the school in the village where you used to go, and he'll learn—Why, Nelly, love! whatever's the matter?'

He might well open his eyes in dismay as he paused and asked the question; for she had covered her face with her hands, and was sobbing convulsively.

'Don't you like me talking of all this?' he asked presently, in a tone of disappointment. 'I thought you would be pleased. You've told me so much about it, that I'm all longing to see it; and I'm sure we couldn't do better than go to it—until your William comes home, I mean—if he ever does come home—which you ought really to begin to

see by now, Nelly, isn't as certain as that chickens come out of eggs, by a long way. You hate the dirt, and the smoke, and the bawling, and the clatter of this place; you know you do—and it's making you sick. You're pining for the sweet air and the sunshine, and the fields and trees of your old home. You know you are. And you're breaking your heart for a sight of your old father's face—you know you are: but you can't make up your mind to go back to it all, till you hear some sure news of your William. It's my belief you'll never do that, Nelly. I only wish there was a chance of it: for though I never saw him, through him sailing away a week before you took me in that night, I know he must be real good; and *real good* folks are scarce enough, ain't they, Nell?

A deep sigh was Nelly's only answer.

'He was—wasn't he?' asked Charlie, after waiting some time for further remark.

'What, love?' she inquired, glancing from her work at his little white, serious face.

'Really good!' he exclaimed, strongly emphasizing the words; 'out and out good—so good that he couldn't no ways be gooder.'

And then, to his consternation, she uttered a sharp cry of pain, and covering her thin face with her hands, sobbed aloud.

Some moments passed before she could yield to his repeated entreaties, and explain the cause of her distress.

'It's nothing, dear,' she then said, struggling hard to check her sobs—and again plying her needle busily—'nothing; but your question suddenly brought thoughts to my heart, that have given me many a weary hour, and that will give me many another; aye, and many another. I'll open my mind to you to-night, Charlie. It will do me good to let it out, maybe, instead of keeping it all so tight to myself, and most driving my senses away with being all alone in my wonderings, and thinkings, and hopings. There—I'm better now. Break me a needleful of cotton from the reel, love. See—it's fallen to the floor, just by your foot. I must stitch while I talk, or I'll not get these trousers across the river to-night. Wasn't my William real good, you asked, didn't you, dear? Aye, he was, bless him!—as you say, "out and out good"—"so good that he couldn't no ways be gooder," to *me*, that is.

But he wasn't good to *himself*, Charlie. Ah, no!—he was right *bad* to himself.'

Charlie's eyes opened wide.

'Did he hurt himself? Did he go near to kill himself? Did he starve himself?' he asked in an awed whisper.

Bright tears fell upon the work in Nelly's hand, and had to be brushed from her eyes before she could see where to place her needle.

'Not a day passed that he didn't do all three,' she replied by-and-by; 'not a day passed that he did not hurt himself, and starve himself, and risk killing himself—and the best part of himself, too—the part that had to live for ever; the part that the blessed Lord died for; the part that ought to have flown away to glory and peace when the rest of him was laid low in the grave. That was the part that poor William was so bad to—his precious soul. He was good, oh so good and kind to everything else, and to everyone else; but he was right bad to his soul—terribly unkind and cruel to his soul.'

'I don't quite see what you're driving at,' observed Charlie, with a puzzled frown. '*Cruel to his soul!* I know what *soul* means; you've told me. But whatever did your William do to his soul?'

'He did nothing at all to it, love. That was just it. He never gave it a thought. He never asked the good Lord to keep His eye on it. He never whispered the least little prayer for it. He mightn't have had a soul for all the care he took of it. And he'd have a joke for every serious word I said to him, and a light laugh for every bit of warning I ventured to whisper to him, and a put-off promise, that he never meant to keep, every time I tried to coax him—and *this* is the end.'

'What?' inquired Charlie, as she paused with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

'I was only thinking of the night he sailed, love,' she said sadly. 'We were out together, and we passed a church—one of the great God's houses—and the bell rang out loudly. I could have sworn it was calling us to come in. I made him stop to listen; and then I whispered, "Let's go and ask for a blessing on this voyage, and beg the good Lord to bring you back safe—for, without His blessing, who knows what may happen!"'

'And did you go in?' asked Charlie.

Nelly took up her needle.

'No, dear,' she replied sorrowfully. 'He'd a laugh, and a joke, and careless words as usual, and we passed on. All down the street those bells were ringing angrily, it seemed to me—threateningly, it seemed to me. And oh, I've heard them so often since, Charlie—night and day. And all they said has come to pass.'

Charlie's brow once more became puckered with perplexed thoughts. He was not quite certain that he understood what Nelly had been telling him, and all his thinking did not seem to make it any clearer; so in a little while he dismissed the whole subject, and, after whistling a few bars of a merry tune for baby's edification, observed:

'I know *one* thing, Nell—that is, that you loved your William very much; and if he had not been real good you would not have loved him at all. But if he's been and got drowned—why, of course he's drowned. Why won't you see that, and listen to all I've fixed so straight in my mind to make you well and strong, and as happy as you can be, now that—now that—well, now that your poor William is away—if you like.'

'Aye—put it like that, if you will, Charlie,' she sobbed; 'but don't whisper that he is drowned, love—don't whisper it—it would be *too* hard. I'll go on praying the Lord to send him back. I *must*. I should die if I didn't. Don't whisper that he's drowned, love, or my heart will break.'

'I won't, Nelly,' he replied. 'I won't say another word about anything, if you'll only stop crying. Oh, don't sob so, Nell, love! you'll make me cry too, if you don't stop.'

She did her best to check her grief, remarking, as she once more plied her needle:

'Don't mind me, Charlie; I'm tired to-night—more tired than usual, and I ache all over. I think those few tears have done me good. I'm better now. Go on about the old home, love. I like to hear you talk. Go on, dear.'

'Well then, Nell,' he resumed, brightening, 'we'll go there, as I said. And your old father will be so glad to see us; for he must have been very lonely since you left him—everyone he loves being dead but you. There—you're crying again.'

'No—no—dear,' she managed to murmur ; 'it's my eyes—they water so ; they are weak with looking so much at this work, I think.'

'You haven't near light enough,' he replied ; 'see, I'll give the fire a kick and make a blaze. There, that's better ! isn't it ?'

'Very much, dear,' she replied. 'Go on with your talk ; I like it.'

'Well, let me see. What was I telling you ? Oh, I know—about your father. Yes, he'll be rare and glad to see us, and so proud of his grandson—our baby. By-the-bye, Nell, when we get there we must have him christened first thing. What shall we call him ? William—after his daddy, your sailor husband ; or Charlie—after your little brother that died ? No, that won't do, either ; because my name is Charlie, and we shouldn't know when you were calling one and when the other. Suppose we called him Tom, or Bob ? I think *Bob* is a fine name.'

Nelly dropped her work, and sat musing for a moment or two. Then she replied :

'I don't care to give baby a name like that. I've had a fancy all along to call him after some one in the good Lord's book, the blessed Bible. What would be nice ? Mark ? Luke ? Moses ? They don't sound to my fancy. Peter ? John ? Thomas ? They are everyday names, after all. Ah ! this one will do—Paul. We'll call him Paul.'

'*Paul*,' repeated Charlie, in astonishment. 'I never heard tell of such a name—*Paul*. It sounds mighty queer. Why is the baby to be called *Paul* ?'

'Because,' she replied, 'that was the name of such a good good man ; and I want baby to grow up very very good, and so I'll call him after him. There, Charlie, this pocket is done at last. Give me my little Paul on my knee, dear, and you tie the trousers into a bundle for me. Oh, I am *so* tired. I shall be so glad when I can lie down and rest.'

'That won't be for a good two hours or more,' said Charlie, as he placed the baby in her arms. 'It will take you twenty minutes' sharp walking to get to the quay, and a quarter of an hour to cross the river, and quite half an hour to get to the shop. You won't be back before ten o'clock, Nell. I'm afraid you'll be regular done up.'

'I can rest all to-morrow,' she replied; 'but I wish I was safe back, for I feel so strange somehow, as if I didn't quite know what I was doing. I think it must be my head, it is beating all ways.'

'And how hot you are!' said Charlie, as he caught hold of her thin hand; 'I shouldn't think you'd feel the cold much, for you're burning like fire.'

'I'll go off at once,' she said, 'while I'm able to find my way. To-morrow's rest will maybe set me right. Take baby, love; ah! he's dropped his barley-sugar. Here it is. Now, where's my bonnet and shawl?'

She fastened her threadbare garments about her slight form, and took the bundle of trousers in her arms. Then, with a 'Now I'm off,' she stepped to the door, and passed through. But she had hardly reached the bottom of the stairs when a thought seemed to strike her, and she returned.

'Have you forgotten anything?' asked Charlie, as she entered the room.

'No, love,' she said, 'nothing.' But she put down her bundle, and taking her baby from his arms, held it closely to her breast. 'My little Paul!' she murmured, kissing it fondly; 'my dear little Paul! Poor father's own little Paul! Take great care of him, Charlie;' and then she gave the child back, and hurried out again. Charlie followed her, with the candle in his hand, and standing at the top of the stairs, watched her out of sight. Just as her well-worn bonnet was disappearing round a turn of the staircase, baby Paul once more dropped his barley-sugar, and stretching out his arms towards her, uttered the only sound his little lips had as yet learned to articulate: 'Mam! mam! mam!'

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## CHAPTER II.

'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; . . . For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.'—  
ISAIAH xliii. 2, 3.

THE great clock of the cathedral had just struck. Charlie had counted each chime as it rang through the night air, and when the last one died away, he had repeated it aloud,

three or four times, with white lips and beating heart, *Twelve!* Could it be possible? *Twelve!* Oh yes! he had made no mistake. Four times had those chimes reached his ear since Nelly had left to take her bundle of work home to the shop, and each time he had counted them; nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. Yes, the last was really twelve; but Nelly had not yet come home. Where could she be? He had been sitting listening for her footsteps ever since ten. The milk, that he had said he would have ready for her, had been heated again and again, the fire had been replenished until his stock of coal was almost exhausted, baby Paul was sound asleep in the folds of the red shawl, and he himself was beginning to find his eyelids very heavy and difficult to keep open. But Nelly had not come home. Where could she be? He got up and opened the door. The sounds of unlawful mirth and, alas, of strife and anger, so common to such localities on Saturday nights, ascended from the various rooms below. He listened for a moment, and then tripped noiselessly downstairs into the court. No one was about. The bitter cold kept each one who called that dreary spot *home* within doors. He made his way to the street. The fog was denser than ever. He could neither see nor hear anything, and after shivering for some moments, straining eyes and ears in vain to catch some tidings of poor Nelly, he returned to baby Paul's side. The flames of the fire had died away, and two or three mice, emboldened by the darkness, were peeping curiously from their holes in the skirting-board. Charlie threw himself down by the baby's side, and watched the glittering of their bright eyes, as they turned their little heads from side to side. They were trying to pluck up their courage for a scamper to the opposite corner, where they had espied a crust that baby Paul had dropped during one of his 'crawls' across the room. Very soon after they were whisking their tails in delight as they nibbled their prize. Insignificant as they were, their tiny brains worked sufficiently well to assure them that they were in perfect safety, for there was no cat about, and Charlie was fast asleep. He slept well, for he was tired out with working, and watching, and waiting; and it was not until baby Paul had twice stuck his little fingers into his eyes and pulled his hair, that he awoke and sat up.

The light was streaming through the little window, showing him that the morning must be fairly advanced, and the cathedral clock at that moment rang out loudly and clearly to tell the awakened city that the hour of nine was past. Nine! he sprang to his feet, and searched eagerly around. No, his worst fear was realized. Nelly had not come home. Oh, what could have happened? She must have missed her way in the terrible fog! Had she been wandering about the streets all night? Why, she would be dead with cold! He must go and see. With feverish haste he made a fire, that baby Paul might not be starved with cold, for he did not mean to take him with him. He would be better by himself in the warm room than out in the sharp, frosty air. And there was no one he could leave him with. Bridget Mulligan, his only friend, was away, and her room, the front one in the house at the end of the court, locked up, and there were no other neighbours that he cared to leave Nelly's baby with. No, he must stay by himself. He would cry, of course, but there was no help for that. He broke him off a crust from a portion of a loaf he had bought out of his shilling the night before, and he gave it him to suck. Then he threw a rope round his waist, and tied him securely to a hook in the wall, that he might not crawl to the fire and burn himself. That was all he could do; so with a hasty kiss he rushed from the room and out into the street. Faster and faster went his flying feet towards the quay, and panting for breath he reached it, and looked eagerly about for some of the sailors, that he might question them. Had any of them seen a girl with a bundle in her arms, crossing the river the night before? No, this one had not, and that one had not, and that one had not, and that other one had not. So he went from one to another, his face growing whiter, his heart beating more quickly with each one. At last the boat drew near—the boat from the very place where Nelly had been going. He stepped aside while the passengers landed; then he rushed on board and addressed himself eagerly to the captain. Had he seen a girl, with a bundle wrapped in newspaper in her arms, the night before?

'Had she crossed by the eight o'clock boat?'

'Yes, yes; it would be about that time.'

'Did she wear an old black shawl, and a brown dress?'



'Oh, yes, yes, she did.'

'And a black bonnet?'

'Yes; oh, yes; *that* was Nelly! Had the captain seen her?'

The captain looked at the breathless boy, so eagerly hanging on his words; and he paused, and scratched his head, as though in perplexity, before he answered him.

'Is she your sister—this poor lass you're asking after?' he asked, presently.

'No, no!' was Charlie's reply. 'No, I never had a sister.'

'She couldn't have been your mother,' continued the captain; 'she was years too young for that. What was she to you?'

'Oh, nothing!' he cried. 'She was nothing but Nelly! my dear Nelly!—kind, pretty Nelly! And she's never come home. Did you see her, sir? Do you know where she went? Oh, *do* tell me!'

'I'll tell you all I know, and welcome,' said the captain. 'I only wish I'd something good to say of your poor Nelly; but I haven't; it's bad—very bad! There, don't stare like that, lad! Thank God she was nothing to you—for blood's thicker than water; though it's often a knock-down-kind of a blow to lose a friend. Your Nelly will never come home again. I *did* see her. I saw her stepping on the boat. Something was wrong with her. She reeled, as if she'd gone dizzy like; and if I hadn't put out my hand to help her, she'd have fallen at my feet. I caught a glance of her eyes, as I led her to that very seat yonder, and the thought flashed through me that they looked a bit wild; and her cheeks were as scarlet as two poppies. I was sorry after that I'd not kept my eye upon her; but somehow I've the knack of thinking the right thing too late.'

Charlie's lips were growing whiter and whiter; he was pressing his hands to his heart to still its beating.

'Where is she?' he managed to gasp, as the captain again paused.

The man coughed uneasily.

'We did all we could,' he said. 'We stopped the boat, and threw out a buoy, before you could have counted your five fingers. But, bless you! with the tide running out as it did last night, and a fog on that you could have cut with a knife, what could be done for the poor thing?'

'Where is she?' almost shrieked Charlie, a horrible fear falling upon him.

'There, there, lad!' said the captain kindly. 'Bear it like a man. These sorts of blows are common to every life, and the sooner we get used to them the better. We were half way across the river, when we heard a splash. Why she did it, or how she did it, no one knows; for we hadn't many passengers by that boat, and no one saw her go. But she'd gone, bundle and all—right overboard into the river; and being, as I said before, a dark foggy night, and the tide running out at the rate of—— Halloo!'

With a loud shriek of despair and sorrow, Charlie had fallen fainting on deck. They bore him with rough yet sympathising hands to where he could be tended and won back to life; and then they left him to return to their several duties, and forget the painful incident in the whirl of their busy lives. But there was to be no forgetfulness for *him*, for many a long sad day. In an hour or so he was able to walk slowly home. He entered the little room. Baby Paul was asleep. He sat down beside him, feeling like one in a dream. He tried to think, but his brain seemed to be numb. One sight only was before his eyes—the dark water closing over the head of his dear friend. One thought only was in his heart—*she will never come home!* He repeated it aloud, mechanically, over and over again. Then he glanced round the little room. There were her thimble and her reel of cotton, where she had placed them on the mantelpiece; there was the milk he had bought for her the night before; there was her old bonnet—her dress. How all the things seemed to stare at him! How empty everything looked! *Never come home!* What, Nelly!—Paul's mammy!—*never come home!* Was it possible? Was he awake? or was he dreaming some hideous dream?

So the day passed on. At intervals, Paul awoke; and had to be fed, and kept warm, and comforted when he cried; otherwise Charlie would have sat hour after hour motionless as a statue. Then came the night. It was bitterly cold. The fire had died out, and there was no coal to replenish it. He had sat thinking and thinking, heedless that the darkness had gathered around him, and that he was shivering in every limb. Paul awoke from a long sleep, and roused

him by breaking into a loud fit of crying. All Charlie's attempts at consolation were in vain. He wouldn't be soothed, he wouldn't be danced up and down, he would do nothing but scream, and scream right lustily he did.

'Poor little chap!' thought Charlie at last; 'maybe he has just found out that something is wrong with his poor mammy? I'll go and see if Bridget Mulligan has come home. If she has, she'll let me make him some sop by her fire. P'raps it's that he wants. I haven't given him much to-day. There, there, old fellow; we'll go to the warmth and the light, so don't cry any more.'

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### CHAPTER III.

'For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good.'—MARK xiv. 7.

BRIDGET MULLIGAN was a dark-eyed woman of about six-and-thirty years of age. Her husband, Tom Mulligan, earned a scanty living down by the river, helping to load and unload barges, and doing any odd jobs that came in his way. Poverty had made him surly, and, to make up for the discomfort produced by its constant presence in his little home, he had acquired the habit of his class of spending all his spare time at the public-house, from whence he always returned with empty pockets, confused brain, unsteady legs, and angry temper. This had somewhat soured the natural brightness of the young girl whom he had brought, some sixteen years before, from a simple Irish valley to share the squalid misery of a city court; but even this painful change of scene and habits had not yet entirely dispelled her natural gaiety, nor hardened her kind heart. She was a good type of her race; good-humoured, fiery, indolent, and easy. She did not trouble herself much about cleanliness, as she said:

'Water's mighty cowl'd in winter, and coal's too dear to be wasted heating it; as for soap, it's dear all the year round, and no one can clean without it; so the things can go dirty, and bad luck to 'em.'

She still loved her husband, though he had brought her nothing but wretchedness and suffering; and she cooked

his scanty meals for him, mended his rags when there was really danger of their falling from him altogether, and made the best of the few pence she succeeded in coaxing out of him from time to time. She would have fared badly had this been all she had to depend upon; but she had a way of increasing her funds unknown to him. Every morning, her two-years-old baby in her arms, she spent a couple of hours in wandering through the streets of commerce and fashion, soliciting halfpence from the passers-by. She had a pleasant round face, and few could resist her bright smile and extraordinary plausibility; so she generally returned home with sufficient in her pocket to, at all events, put a loaf in her cupboard and a fire on her hearth.

When Charlie reached her door, she was sitting listlessly over the fire. Her baby, a little girl, was asleep on a broken black-looking sofa. A clock, that had stood still for many a year, a chair or two without backs, and a three-legged stool, completed the furniture of the room. She looked up as she heard the latch click, and then cried:

'Halloo, Charlie! what brings *you* here at this time of night?'

The familiar voice, and the sense of having a true sympathiser to unburden his troubled breast to, at last thawed the fountain of Charlie's grief; and a loud sob was his only answer. Bridget's face grew grave; rising hastily, she took little Paul from him, and asked, in a tone of great concern:

'Is Nelly worse?'

'Oh, Bridget, Bridget!' he wailed, and could get no further.

'There, sit you down, honey,' she said, after a puzzled stare of some few seconds; 'sit you down, and tell me all about it. Why, what ails the lad?' and she pushed him kindly on to the stool by the fire, and, with Paul in her arms, sat down on her chair opposite. 'Now, darlin',' said she, 'don't take on so. Tell me your trouble. Maybe I can help you out of it.'

He took his wet fingers from his eyes, and sobbed:

'She's gone, Bridget! Oh, dear, dear! she's gone!'

'*Gone*, Charlie! What, Nelly?' exclaimed the woman in surprise.

'Yes, yes!' he moaned; 'she's gone! She's dead—that's what I mean. Oh, dear, dear! poor Nelly—my dear Nelly!—she's drowned!'

'*What?*' shrieked Bridget.

And when she thoroughly understood the facts of the sad story, and by dint of eager and searching questions had arrived at the conclusion that there could be no mistake respecting the fate of the poor girl, her distress knew no bounds. She left him to sob on undisturbed, while she held little Paul tenderly against her breast, whispered something about 'motherless lamb,' and stooping to kiss his white forehead, watered it with her hot tears. By-and-by she said:

'There, sweetheart, don't take on so. It's very hard, but there's no use of crying after them as have left us for good. An ocean of tears won't bring poor Nell back; and it's no one's fault that she's gone. What's the odds where one's grave lies, in the water, or on dry land? And if Nelly hadn't found her way to the one, she'd have been laid in the other before many weeks were out. She was mighty sick, you know, Charlie; and had been for many a month past. Do you mind the cough she had?'

'It was worse than ever last night,' he sobbed; 'but she had to go out to take the work home to the shop. I wish she hadn't—oh, how I wish she hadn't! She wasn't fit to go. The captain of the boat told me she reeled on board. It was from weakness. She should have been at home in bed with the baby.'

'Ay,' observed Bridget thoughtfully, 'I see how it's been. Poor Nell! she was sick and weak. The weakness must have got to her head, as she was sitting alone, maybe, watching the dark shining waters, and filled it with there's no telling what fancies. We are such poor things when our brains don't work proper-like. For all we know, she may have thought she saw her William beckoning to her—I've heard of such things—and jumped right into the glistening waves to get to him.'

'We'd been talking of him just before she went out,' sobbed Charlie. 'She would have it that he was alive, and would come home to her yet, though I tried as much as I dared to show her it couldn't be.'

'Poor lass! poor young lass!' cried Bridget; 'then she went out with her poor head full of him, and being weak and ill, it has all happened as I said, depend upon it! There, there, young 'un! Come, stop that noise! Why, bless the babe! what's wrong with him?'

Paul was again screaming loudly.

'He's hungry,' explained Charlie, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand. 'I thought you'd p'raps let me give him his sops down here. It is so lonely upstairs, and we've no fire there.'

'You thought quite right, honey,' she replied, 'quite right. See, here's the cup and spoon I've been using for little Susie, and there's a loaf and a bit of sugar in the cupboard yonder, and the kettle's just boiling. Get him some food quick, lad. He must be rare and hungry to cry like this.'

It was only a bit of bread steeped in hot water, with a little coarse sugar sprinkled over it, that Charlie had to give the child; but he was very hungry, and ate almost ravenously. It was curious to see how tenderly the other fed him, speaking coaxing baby language the while, and forgetting his great trouble sufficiently to smile as he saw how the food was enjoyed. But when the last spoonful had been given, and the little one lay asleep in his arms, he sat looking into the fire and thinking of all he had lost, until once more hot tears chased themselves freely down his cheeks. Meanwhile the night grew darker and darker. The snow, that had been falling the greater part of the day, had stopped now, and lay like a white fleecy carpet upon the rough, well-worn stones of the court, and upon the roofs of the houses, and on the pipes and ledges, and on every little resting-place it could find. No matter how small, if there were only room for one or two flakes, there they were, tenderly laid down, as if the snow were really anxious to hide, beneath its pure, glimmering drapery, the many evidences of poverty and degradation that lay around. So Charlie thought, as a bright moonbeam suddenly streamed through the window, and caused him to turn his head and look out upon the glistening whiteness. When his gaze again sought the fire, the flames had died away, and very black and silent the little apartment appeared. The moonbeam was playing upon the wall now. It was falling full upon the broken face of the old clock in the

corner. Charlie got up, and he stood with his back to the wall, so that the rays fell upon him and upon the sleeping baby in his arms, and glancing through the window, far up into the dark heavens, he could see where they came from.

That round yellow ball! that was the moon. God had made it to lighten the world at night. Nelly had told him that. The moon did not look *very* far off; but it *was*. It was thousands, and thousands, and thousands of miles away! and Heaven was beyond that again—far, far beyond that again—and Nelly had gone there. Oh! what a long way Nelly was from him now; and only an hour ago she had been *so* near. Charlie's lip began to tremble, and he returned to his seat by the fire. The moonbeam was falling across the old sofa now, where little Susie was fast asleep. How bright it was! How beautiful it made the dingy, dusty, stained, threadbare covering of that old sofa! Even Tom's old shirt, that Charlie knew was nothing but a filthy rag, gleamed like polished metal in its light. Yes, the moon was beautiful; but then it came from the sky, and everything that came from the sky was beautiful; perhaps because it was near Heaven. Rain was sparkling, fresh, and cool; snow was white and brilliant; sunbeams were warm and golden; and rays from the moon were gentle and altogether lovely. It was only the world that was dark, and foul, and miserable. Very dark, and foul, and miserable poor little Charlie found it; for *his* world lay in desolate places indeed.

Just then Bridget ejaculated loudly: 'Ah, me!' and then heaved a deeply-drawn sigh. Charlie responded with another. So five minutes past, then Bridget took up the piece of iron, part of the casing of an old wheel, that served her for a poker, and with a vigorous stir provoked the flames to shoot out brightly once more. As she did so she said:

'Well, we must all go sooner or later, and for my part I thinks them as goes sooner has the best of it. Anyhow, Nelly has, poor lass! for she was a good girl, Charlie, and not fit for the life she led here. She would never have been happy; and where was the use of her lingering on and on in this world, if she was never to be happy any more? Maybe the good Lord thought like that, and so sent for her straight off. Ah! she'll be a deal better off in Heaven, lad; so don't take on about her. And she'll be there, never fear! I

daresay she's a singing afore the throne this minute, if we could only see her. Heaven was made for the good, you know, Charlie, and Nell was mighty good. I never met anyone that was as good as Nell.'

'No more did I, Bridget. I never met anyone that was good at all, till that night when I'd tried to steal her purse from her, and she took me home, 'cause I looked so cold and hungry; and she kept me with her, 'cause I said I'd nowhere to go. Oh, I did love her so, Bridget! I shall never love no one no more. I shall never be happy no more;' and he broke into a fresh burst of tears.

'Yes, you will,' replied Bridget, soothingly; 'you'll see you will. Don't take on, lad. As I told you before, even if this hadn't happened, nothing could have kept poor Nell here much longer. She's been pining away ever since the little one was born, and long before that too.'

'She's been pining away ever since they told her at that office that they'd given up all thoughts of ever seeing the *Henry James* come back,' sobbed Charlie. 'Though she would keep hoping and hoping that she'd see her William again, in spite of all the water that must have swallowed him up with the rest of the crew. And though she would keep on praying that the Lord would send him home to her, and sticking to it that He would, her poor heart was broken. And you know, Bridget, there was nothing to be done. Nothing would mend her heart like, but to see her William walking up home to her, and to his bit of a baby that he's never seen and knows nothing about; and that could never, never be. Drowned men never come home; and Nell's William was drowned when the ship went down, all the gentlemen in the office say so, and of course they know. But oh, dear, dear! I didn't want her to be drowned too.'

'And why not?' asked Bridget; 'folks say a death in the water is the easiest of all. And I'm sure it was as well, if not a sight better, than slowly dying inch by inch of want, and cold, and pain, and all that's horrible and hard to bear, in O'Brian's Court. I know which I'd choose.'

To this observation Charlie made no reply. A silence of some minutes ensued, during which the flames of the fire again died away, and the moonbeams once more shone



bright and clear upon the old wall. Bridget shivered as her eye fell upon them, and she said in a half whisper :

‘Look, Charlie!’

‘What?’ he asked.

‘The moon,’ she replied, still in an undertone; ‘it’s creeping all along the floor and up the wall.’

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘it’s been there all along. Isn’t it pretty?’

‘Pretty!’ she repeated, as though her ears had deceived her; ‘did you say *pretty*, Charlie?’

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Don’t *you* call it pretty? Nell used to say the sun and the moon were the only good things that ever came into our room. She said they were worth all the world to her; for when ever she saw them, she used to think that God hadn’t forgot us, or He’d never have been sending His own lights shining in, as if we were angels, instead of big sinners. That’s what Nell used to say.’

But this was an idea altogether beyond Bridget’s untutored brain; all she replied, therefore, was :

‘I’m fond of the sun myself; and the moon’s well enough in the street; but when it comes pouring into one’s bit of a room like that,’ pointing to the light on the wall, ‘without asking your leave the least bit in the world, I always gets thinking it’s summat alive. I was always frighted of the moon. Look there! it’s right on Susie’s little face!’

‘It’ll do her no harm,’ cried Charlie, for Bridget’s tone was full of fear. ‘The moon’s a very good thing; I’m sure it is, ’cause God made it, and it comes from near Heaven. I’ll put my young ’un down in it, and let it shine on him a bit.’

So Charlie turned to the old sofa and laid little Paul by Susie’s side. The change of posture disturbed the former sufficiently to make him half open his eyes and throw up his little hands. Charlie turned him on to his side and hushed and patted him. He was soon again in sound slumber; but one little arm lay round Susie’s neck, and the tiny fingers were clutching her fair curls.

‘Come and look at them, Bridget,’ said Charlie presently. ‘They *do* look pretty!’

Perhaps the moonbeams thought so too, for they lingered lovingly on the two small heads. And perhaps they whispered pleasant stories of the land they came from, for quiet

smiles brightened the features of the baby-sleepers, and Bridget's eyes filled with hot tears.

'I'm wondering what they'll both have to go through, pretty little dears!' she murmured, 'afore they lie as sound asleep as poor Nell? This world's a queer place to travel over; leastways to them as everything turns out contrary. It's all scratching and tugging, and a-getting up a bit here, and a-falling down flat there, and a-worriting and crying; and it may be all our own fault—and nobody would go for to say it wasn't—but to look at them pretty babbies, for all the world like two daisies nestling together, and to think what time will make 'em! Lor me! it would make the moon itself weep, if it knowed it as I do.'

Charlie was too young as yet to speculate upon the probabilities of a dark or trying future for anyone, most of all for the two little creatures lying before him, so helpless and harmless. To him the future was a mysterious, undefined, but blissful time, long in coming, but certain to dawn some day. For one thing, it would make him a man—a big, strong man—when he would, of course, be able to do wonderful things, to *go* where he liked, to *be* what he liked, and to *have* what he liked. Oh yes! Charlie had no fears about his future, nor about baby Paul's future, nor about Susie's, for that matter; so Bridget's apprehensions and misgivings fell unheeded on his ears.

'What are daisies?' was his only remark, as he softly stroked Paul's downy head.

'Bits of white posies as grows all over the grass,' replied Bridget. 'I ain't seen one this sixteen years, and you've never seen one at all.'

'Have you been living here sixteen years, Bridget?'

'Aye, lad,' she answered, with a deep sigh, 'it's sixteen years gone by since I left the daisies, and the grass, and the green trees, for Tom Mulligan; and I've seen ten dear children go to sleep in my arms in them years—thank the good Lord for it! And little Susie's the only one as ever kept awake so long—and thank the Lord for that too! for she's my only bit of comfort. Hark! Charlie, what's that?'

A shuffling was heard at the door, a fumbling for the latch, and then an angry fist thumped on the panels, and a rough voice called:

‘Bridget!’

‘It’s Tom,’ whispered the woman; and hastily throwing open a door in the wall, she continued rapidly: ‘Quick, Charlie; in here—that’s right. He’s had just enough to anger him like. Here, take little Susie as well; she’ll be safer with you. All right, Tom, honey, I’m a-coming.’

As she spoke she opened the door, and Tom rolled in. What followed is as well not described. Why dwell upon the depth to which human nature can fall when enslaved by that terrible enemy ‘drink?’ For more than an hour Charlie lay in the small closet in which he had taken refuge, his bed the boards, his covering some old sacks, listening to the incoherent rambling and boisterous merriment of Bridget’s unhappy husband. Dreading lest the two children should awake and attract the drunkard’s attention by their cries, he contrived to keep them both in his arms, that they might be as warm as possible. But this was his only concern. He was too well habituated to such scenes to feel either surprised or alarmed. No language could be terrible enough to shock *his* ears; no unkindness great enough to arouse indignant astonishment in *his* breast. Even when the sound of a heavy fall reached him, followed by Bridget’s voice in sobbing, angry expostulation, he merely gave a little sigh, accompanied by the reflection:

‘Poor Bridget! Well, it’s better her than the children. A fall like that would have killed *them* proper.’

There was no window to this four-foot square closet, where he lay between the sacks with the babies in his arms; and so no moonbeams could steal in and shed their soft light around. It was too dark for him to see even the little heads nestling one against each shoulder. His eyelids were getting very heavy and his senses confused. Nelly had taught him to say a prayer every morning and evening; only a few words, that the great God who had made him would help him to be ‘honest and respectable;’ a very necessary petition for a lad whose early years had been passed in such dark scenes as poor little Charlie’s. But for the last few weeks he had added a new request quite on his own account.

‘Nell,’ he had said one day, when an unusually violent fit of coughing had sadly exhausted the poor girl, ‘when will your cough be gone?’

'I don't know, love,' she had replied.

'Will it be gone in two weeks, do you think, Nelly?'

'Perhaps, dear.'

'Will it be quite gone in a-many weeks, Nell?'

'If God pleases, dear,' she had said with a sigh.

'You said God would keep me "honest," if I kept on asking Him, didn't you, Nell?' Charlie had remarked, after a pause of some five minutes.

'Oh yes, love; indeed He will.'

'Will He do *everything* I ask Him, Nell?'

Nelly had hesitated before replying. This was a dangerous subject to bring before such an unenlightened intellect as Charlie's; so, after a brief consideration, all she would trust herself to say was:

'If it is a *good* thing, dear, most certainly.'

'Ah!' Charlie had replied; 'then He'll do *this*. He'll make you quite well, if I ask Him. That's a *very* good thing; that couldn't noways be gooder.'

So he *had* asked Him. The words, 'Lord, make Nell quite well,' had never been forgotten, night or morning. And he had fully expected that the request comprised in them would be granted. That Nelly should get better appeared to him, as he said, *a very good thing*. That divine wisdom might consider it *a very bad thing* was a line of reasoning far above his years; so he had asked in all faith, without the shadow of doubt or wavering. To-night, as sleep was pressing heavily upon him, he remembered his customary prayer, and with it his denied petition. Hot tears once more flowed down his cheeks, and his bosom rose and fell this time with *indignant* grief.

'It ain't true!' he said to himself passionately. 'I asked Him to make her well, and He hasn't; He has let her die. It ain't true! He *don't* hear; and I'll pray no more, I won't!'

And the great God of love, mercy, and compassion heard the angry declaration; and He sent down one of the ministering angels who wait to do His bidding; and the angel entered even into that dark, squalid, little closet, and weighed down the wet eyelids and hushed the angry sobs in peaceful sleep, and refreshed the tired spirit with bright dreams and visions.

## CHAPTER IV.

‘For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat.’—MATT. xxv. 42.

‘CHARLIE ! Charlie !’ Charlie was standing in a beautiful country. There were trees waving above him, and birds were singing sweetly in their branches, and the sky was blue, and the sunshine warm and golden, and the grass was soft and green beneath his naked feet, and flowers of all colours, blue, crimson, violet, and white, were growing all around him. He felt half afraid. Where was he ? He must be dreaming ! He rubbed his eyes. No—he was wide awake, and there were the trees, and the grass, and the birds, and the flowers, just as Nelly used to tell him were all around her old country home. He must be there ! Some one must have carried him there while he was asleep. Ah ! how glad he was. A flood of rapturous joy filled his heart, and he was on the point of testifying his delight by racing hither and thither in the fresh grass and cool breeze, when his feet were suddenly arrested by hearing some one call him.

‘Charlie ! Charlie !’ He knew that voice—oh, so well !—and saw where it came from. Who was that standing not six yards from him ? Why, who but Nelly, herself ! Nelly—not pale and thin and weary, but rosy and bright, and her own sweet smile was upon her face, only there was no tinge of sadness in it now ; and her arms were stretched out towards him, and she was calling him—‘Charlie ! Charlie !’

Then she was not drowned ! It was all a dreadful dream ! She was there before him, strong and well, and happy ! With an eager cry he was rushing to her—when he paused—and only just in time. Between him and her lay a dark, deep chasm—a chasm that defied his most penetrating glance to measure its depths—down, down, it went ; and he was even now tottering on its very brink—another step, and he would have been hurled into its unfathomable darkness. With a shudder he drew back. How strange that he had not seen this chasm before ! There it lay visible enough, long, and deep, and dark. Then he could not get to Nelly, after all ! And yet there she was smiling, and beckoning, and calling. Could she not see what separated them from each

other? Did she want him to throw himself headlong into those dreadful depths and be dashed to pieces and perish? What was the use of calling him, when there was no possibility of his getting to her?

And still she called: 'Charlie! Charlie! Charlie!'

His lip began to quiver. He advanced again to the brink of the chasm, and looked into it. No, it was of no use, however he might long to get across; it was utterly impossible!

'I can't come, Nell,' he murmured dejectedly; but still she beckoned, and still she called, until at last he could bear the disappointment no longer, and throwing himself down on the ground, he burst into tears.

'Charlie! Charlie! Why, what ails the lad! Is it smothering, or choking, you are?—Here! wake up, honey.'

And Charlie opened his eyes to find himself half buried in his sacks, daylight streaming through the open door, and Bridget shaking him roughly by the shoulder.

'Poor darlin'!' said Bridget, sympathisingly; 'it's bad dreams you've been having, and no wonder. Come out to the fire, love; it's biting cold this morning.'

Charlie was quite awake now. He had been dreaming, of course he had; but not a *bad* dream; oh no, a *beautiful* dream. He could not get to Nelly. Well, he knew that; but he had seen her, and she was well and happy—and she had not forgotten him. That was very comforting. Paul was fast asleep; so was Susie. He drew the sacks carefully over them, hoping they would not awake for some time, and joined Bridget, who had returned to her fire. It was indeed very cold; and after Charlie's beautiful dream of the flowers, and sunshine, and grass, the dirt and the poverty around him looked worse than ever. He wiped the tears from his eyes with his hand, thereby smearing his cheeks fantastically, and he exclaimed in a dogged voice:

'I don't care—I don't! I'll cry no more for her. She's well out of it.'

Bridget little guessed the bright vision the boy had had of his lost friend, and that he was comforting himself with the sweet idea that it was not altogether a shadowy dream, but that he had really had a glimpse of Nelly as she was now. She would perhaps have agreed with him more heartily still,

if she had; but even as it was, she echoed his words from the bottom of her heart.

'Well out of it, indeed!' she repeated with a sigh and a groan. 'I wish I'd been took out of it when I was her age; if it wasn't for little Susie I'd wish to be took out of it before twelve o'clock this very morning—that I would! Aye! you do well not to cry for her. Look here, and here, and here, and see what she'd have got, if she hadn't been took out of it.'

As Bridget spoke, she pointed successively to her eye, mouth, and head, which all bore marks of heavy and cruel blows.

Charlie drew a long whistle. 'I heard a dreadful noise last night,' he said; 'but I didn't think you would get so hurt as that. How did it happen?'

'When pots and pans and everything else are sent flying across the room, as they always are when Tom comes home in the state he did last night—which is six nights out of seven—one is bound to get knocked by some of them,' was Bridget's reply. 'I believe he thought—did Tom, that he was after playing battledoor and shuttlecock; for everything he could lay his hands on he pitched about—and a fine state I am in with it all.'

'Indeed you are,' said Charlie; 'but Nelly would never have had that kind of work to put up with. You're quite wrong there. Her William was one of the best of husbands—and so fond of her. She's told me all about him, often and often. He wouldn't have hurt her for the world. He loved her a lot too much.'

'And doesn't my Tom love me, too?' asked Bridget, a little indignantly. 'Did he ever hurt me yet when he was in his sober senses? Not, he indeed! There ain't a kinder lad stepping, than my Tom, when he's no drink to steal his reason away and make a brute of him. I wish I'd the handling of them that makes the drink, I do. They'd make no more to ruin bodies and souls that would be good and quiet but for them; for I'd make them drink themselves to death with their own ruining pison—every man that makes it, and every man that sells it; that's what I'd do with them. Down their throats it should go—pour, pour, pour—whether they liked it or no—till they were just all burnt up, and dried

up, and done for ! That's how I'd settle them ! Oh ! my head !

'I'm sure it hurts,' said Charlie, as, Bridget's invective exhausted, she put her two hands to her head and rockee herself to and fro, as though in pain. 'Why, your face is twice as big as it should be ; I can't see your eye ! Shall I get you a bucket of water ? Cold water's a fine thing for taking away swells.'

'I've got some there, love,' she replied. 'I've been using it this last hour, for Tom woke me early, and I wouldn't disturb you, thinking you were best asleep.'

'Has Tom gone?' asked Charlie, eyeing the old sofa—the only approach to a bed in the room—a little timidly.

'Yes,' she replied ; 'he couldn't bear to see how he's hurt me, so he went out. And he's had no breakfast, poor lad ; nothing but a bite of dry bread, for he hadn't a copper in his pocket. The drink has got it all. And what's to keep the lot of us, I don't know. He'll get no more wages till Saturday ; and when he gets 'em, he'll drink 'em again. And poor me won't be fit to go out to look after a half-penny for many a day. And all the coal I've got is in the grate ; and all the bread I've got is that bit of a crust yonder ; and I'm black and blue all over ; and I'm all aches and pain ; and I wish I was took out of it—I do !'

'I've got a shilling, Bridget,' said Charlie, drawing the coin from his pocket and showing it to her.

A bright smile instantly lighted up Bridget's injured features, but it was only momentary, for, under the circumstances, smiling was painful. With a sigh of relief, she cried :

'Good luck to you, lad ; but that's a rare sight ! The Lord be praised ! we ain't deserted yet ! Run off, Charlie honey ; get a loaf, and an ounce or so of coffee. That will thaw us—for I'm all froze inside, and you look to me much in the same condition. We must have a sup of milk and a pinch of sugar, too ; but mind you save a few coppers for coals. If we don't keep a bit of fire going, we shall be freezeed outright.'

Charlie was already at the door. Bridget shivered as he opened it and let in a stream of cold sharp air. Then she rose from her seat, and picking up the remnants of the little



black kettle, from a corner where Tom had thrown them the night before, contemplated them ruefully. And well she might! A kettle in five separate pieces is certainly an awkward vessel for boiling water. Bridget's bright vision of being comfortably thawed with a cup of hot coffee seemed farther off than ever.

'If it had only pleased the good Lord to make water hot!' she exclaimed bitterly, as she made up her mind that the five pieces were utterly useless, and flinging them aside, returned to her seat by the fire. 'Sure cold water's good for nothing weather like this; and if we'd a fire roaring up the chimney, what's the good of it without a kettle?'

Then she glanced round the apartment in search of something that would replace the broken kettle, but it was in vain. There was a bucket, but it was made of wood; there was a cup, and half a jug, and a cracked basin, but in none of these could water be boiled. So she sighed and bemoaned her hard fate for some five minutes. At the end of that time, however, she made another attempt to smile, and chuckled gleefully. She had remembered seeing a little black kettle on the hob in poor Nelly's room on her last visit, and the vision of hot coffee had once more risen clearly before her.

'I'll go and get it before the lad comes back,' she thought, 'or maybe he'll be wanting to fetch it himself, and he's as well out of sight of his old home—leastways till he's had his breakfast.'

So off she went to the little room at the top of the court, and in a few minutes returned with the kettle in her hand. She filled it with water, put it on the fire, and once more sat down. A serious look was upon her poor bruised face now, and serious thoughts were in her heart. She was thinking how empty that little room looked with no Nelly sitting in her accustomed place bending over her work.

'Where was she? Lying deep down under the quiet dark waters? No!' she exclaimed suddenly, as vehemently as though some one was arguing the point with her, 'it's not! I tell you it's not! What the water is hiding isn't Nell. Where's her pretty smile, and the gentle kind of look in her sweet eyes; and the nice way she'd say: "Well, Bridget!" when I went in to see her of a morning? *That* was Nell!

What the water is keeping so snug and safe is no more *her* than I'm——'

The comparison was left unfinished, for Bridget's thoughts were away now on another track. She was asking where was Nelly, if what the water held was not she? And this question bore her still farther away, unveiled the dead past, and brought to life thoughts and visions that had long slumbered. She was back now in Ireland, a tiny girl in the village school, singing of the 'crowns,' and the 'glory,' and the 'great white throne;' and learning of the blessings stored up in the kingdom of God for those who die in His favour. Tears flowed down her cheeks; drawing her ragged shawl around her, she said with a loud sob:

'Lor', how pretty and innocent I was then, singing with the rest of them!—and look at me now! Charlie was right—quite right! Nell is well out of it.'

Just then the door opened, and Charlie came in. He left the marks of his naked wet feet all along the floor, and coming to Bridget, he put a large loaf in her lap, saying:

'Isn't it a big one? And only threepence! but it's a bit sour, the man says. Something went wrong, and a whole batch of bread got spoilt; so the eightpenny loaves are being sold for threepence. I wish something would go wrong every day.'

'So do I,' cried Bridget heartily. 'An eightpenny loaf for threepence! My, Charlie, that's *rare* luck! And what else did you get, honey?'

'There's two ounces of tenpenny,' he said, drawing from his pocket a package of some dark-looking mixture, strongly suggestive in colour and smell of the root chicory, but which nevertheless found a ready sale in such neighbourhoods as O'Brian's Court as 'fine coffee, tenpence per pound.' 'What do you think of that?' he continued, offering it to her.

She clutched it eagerly, saying:

'Sure it's yourself is the finest boy out, Charlie. See, love, the kettle's just boiling; hand me that old jug there, we'll have a quart of hot coffee that will thaw us proper afore we're five minutes older. Did you get a bit of sugar, darlin'?'

'Yes,' he replied, producing another package from the breast of his shirt, 'here it is; half a pound of twopenny.

It's as brown 'as treacle, and just as sweet. And here, Bridget; here's something else' (rummaging in another pocket). 'I thought as the loaf was so cheap, we'd have a bit of a treat. See! half a quarter of yellow eightpenny, and a farthing red herring! Now, isn't that fine?'

The half-quarter of yellow eightpenny was nothing more or less than a pennyworth of butter—if such a name ought to be applied to the deeply-coloured grease the boy was holding in his hand, screwed up in a piece of newspaper. And that, with the red herring, formed his idea of a 'bit of a treat.' Bridget smacked her lips. The dainties were the more acceptable, being so utterly unexpected.

'I always said you were a love of a boy,' she exclaimed, rising with agility, and bringing to light a rusty bent toasting-fork from underneath a heap of litter on the sofa. 'Give us the herring, honey; and let's get him frizzled. He'll make a lovely smell! Why, where are you off to now?'

Charlie was again at the door, the cracked basin before alluded to in his hand.

It's the milk I'm after,' he replied.

'Never mind the milk, love; we'll do without it. You'd better not spend any more money, Charlie, for we haven't coal to keep the fire in another hour, and we'll be froze without it.'

'I must have a sup of milk,' replied Charlie; 'it's for the young 'un—the baby. He won't drink coffee, and he must have something. I'll get a pen'orth of skim; that will last him the day. Don't fret about the fire, Bridget, I've a copper or two left that will buy coal for to-day; and maybe something will turn up for to-morrow. You get all ready while I'm gone; I won't be a minute.'

When he came back with the little basin nearly full of the bluish thin liquid (two-thirds of which must have come from that famous cow that never runs dry—the pump), he found his breakfast waiting for him.

'Isn't it good?' he said, as he munched his half of the red herring. 'P'raps some day, Bridget, we'll be able to afford one a-piece. When the winter is over, you know, and we've next to no firing to buy, and only the eating to think of.'

'And the rent, Charlie; you've forgot that.'

'Ay!' he cried, 'so I had; and I shouldn't, for I've

thought enough about it, and talked enough about it, to keep it pretty bright in my memory. Four shillings we ought to have had ready for our landlady this very morning. She'll be lucky to get it now. It was that took Nell out last night, or I don't believe she'd have gone, for she was very sick—she said so. She said her head ached, and her throat was sore, and I'm sure she was right bad, not fit to go out on such a night. Oh, dear, I wish she hadn't.'

Here Charlie paused, and two big tears slowly gathered in his eyes, and fell down his cheeks upon the piece of bread in his hand. Then the vision of his lost friend as he had seen her in his dream, bright, beautiful, and happy, came before him, and contrasting her with ragged, unwashed Bridget, sitting opposite, bruised and disfigured, the head of the herring in one hand and the broken cup of black, thick coffee in the other, he resolutely wiped his tears away, exclaiming:

'I don't care! She *is* well out of it! Is there a drop more coffee, Bridget? I'm only thawed one side yet.'

She gave him a fresh supply, and as he was sipping it, asked:

'I suppose Nelly never told you what she would like done with the little 'un, in case things turned out as they are—I don't mean as they *have* turned out, for that, of course, is all an ugly accident—but in case she grew worse with her cough and all, and anything happened to her?'

'No, she never spoke of such a thing,' he replied. 'I don't think she ever thought of the good Lord taking her away. All she said, as she went out, was that I was to take great care of him always, and I will, trust me. And she told me something else, too, last night, something she'd never spoken of before, not ten minutes before she went out.' A sob finished the sentence.

'And what might that be, honey?' asked Bridget, after allowing him time to recover himself.

'It was what we are to call him.'

'Oh, ay!' cried Bridget, 'it's getting time he was called something. Well, what's it to be? William, I suppose, after his poor dad?'

'No,' said Charlie, 'it's not William. It isn't any kind of a name that we hear about. It's a bit queer, to my mind;

but he's got to have it, 'cause his mammy said so. He is to be called Paul.'

'What?' cried Bridget in amazement; '*Poll*'

'No,' said Charlie; '*Poll* is a girl's name; Paul.'

'*Pole*!' exclaimed Bridget, 'did anyone ever hear of such a handle for the poor baby?'

'You say it all wrong,' said Charlie, 'it ain't Pole, it's Paul.'

'Pool!' cried Bridget again, 'worse and worse!'

'You're regular stupid this morning!' cried Charlie; 'it's *Paul*! can't you hear? *Paul*!'

'Oh,' said Bridget, 'I see now. Paul. Ay, to be sure; *Paul*. Yes, I've got it right at last. Paul. I fancy I've heard that name somewhere before too, but a long while ago. Paul! It's an odd name for the little chap, all the same.'

'It is so,' said Charlie; 'but his mammy gave it him, so he must keep it. And the sooner he takes it the better. We'll call him "Paul" from this minute, Bridget.'

'With all my heart, love. Paul! It's pretty, too. Maybe some of Nelly's folks were called Paul.'

'She never told me of any,' replied Charlie.

'Did she ever tell you where she lived afore she married her William?' asked Bridget.

'Oh, yes,' he replied; 'she lived in a lovely place, where the trees and the flowers grew.'

'But what was it called?' interrupted Bridget.

'Oh, I don't know,' he said, 'she never told me that.'

'And did she ever say what her name was afore she was married?' continued Bridget.

'Why, wasn't it Nell?' he asked. 'What would she change her name for?'

'But folks have always two names,' explained Bridget; 'like me: I'm Bridget Mulligan; and Tom's Tom Mulligan; and little Susie's Susan Mulligan. And Nell must have been Nelly something or other; did she never say what?'

Charlie shook his head. 'She never told me that she was anything but Nell,' he replied, 'or that the young 'un was to have any other name but Paul. I could eat another piece of bread, Bridget; I ain't half full yet.'

She pushed the loaf towards him, saying: 'Eat what you want, lad. To be sure we'll be hungry again to-morrow; but

there's no use of pinching ourselves to-day, for all that. We must trust to luck for another loaf.'

So they both had another large slice, and they poured another kettle of water upon the coffee-grounds, and replenished their cups. By-and-by Bridget, who had been wrapt in thought for some moments, observed :

'Well, if you don't know where Nell came from, or what her folks called themselves, I don't see how you can take the young 'un to them.'

'You mean Paul,' said Charlie.

'Yes,' continued Bridget, 'I mean Paul. If you don't know where Nelly's folks are, and who they are, why how can you take Paul to them?'

'Who wants to take him to them?' cried Charlie.

'It would be the best thing that could happen to him,' she replied, 'for as sure as my name's Mulligan, Nelly's folks are well to do in the world, and could bring him up proper.'

Charlie was silent for a little while. He was recalling the many pretty stories that Nelly had told him of her beautiful country home : of the low, thatched cottage, with its creeping ivy drapery ; of the old brindle cow in the shed at the back ; of the small orchard stretching beyond ; of Barney's sty in the corner ; of the big pond at the end of the lane, with the oaks murmuring pleasant secrets around it, and the reeds and docks skirting its banks ; of the ragged robin and foxgloves peeping out of the hedges ; of the sweet-scented hay and golden corn ; of the silvery grey mornings and warm rosy sunsets. Yes, that would be a splendid place to bring Paul up in. If Nelly had lived, perhaps he could have persuaded her to go there, all three of them together. But she was dead, and, as Bridget said, he couldn't take Paul there, when he neither knew the name of the place nor of the old man, Nelly's father. No, he must stay now in the close dark court, that had only grown distasteful to him since he had learned to dream of pleasanter localities.

'Yes,' he replied at length, 'Nelly's people must be far better off than us, though she never told me of anyone but her old father, and she always said that he hadn't a penny more than he wanted to keep him comfortable. And in all her sufferings—and she *did* suffer—she never would write to him for any help. Still, he must be ever so much better off

than we folks here in O'Brian's Court, and I'm sure he'd be rare and glad to see Paul, and he would bring him up real splendid. But what's the use of talking? I don't know how or where to find him; so I must just bring the young 'un up myself.'

'And how will you do it, Charlie love?'

'I'll do it *honest*,' was the firm reply, 'for Nelly was mighty particular about that. "Thou shalt not steal"—she teached it me. I wouldn't let one penny that wasn't rightly come by go towards bringing that little lad up; no, not for all the world.'

'I didn't mean that, love,' she said; 'but what will you do for money like? You haven't a creature to help you with a farthing, and you're such a little chap, so what can you do?'

'I'll do well enough,' he replied resolutely. 'You don't know what a lot I earn at one thing and another. And we want so little: only a bit of fire, and a crust, and a pen'orth of skim every morning for Paul.'

'And the rent,' observed Bridget.

'Ay,' he replied gravely, 'I'd forgot that. We can live nowhere without rent, of course. And where we must go, I can't tell. We must leave our bit of a room this very day, for I haven't the three shillings arrears for that landlady, and she'll never let us stay without it.'

'Never mind her, honey,' cried Bridget, 'don't stay. I'm sure it will be a good thing for you to leave it, you'd find it so lonely. I'll tell you what you shall do, love; you shall just stay here with me. The place is big enough for the lot of us. Tom will be right glad to see you when he's himself (he's a kind fellow, is Tom), and when he's not himself, you can keep out of his way in the bit of a closet there. You slept well last night, didn't you?'

'Fine!' replied Charlie, and his eyes sparkled with gratitude as he continued: 'You're right good, Bridget; I'll stay with you, and we'll all pull together. Thank you, oh, so much! Halloo!'

As he uttered this exclamation, he sprang from his seat and rushed towards the little closet, for Paul had just announced that he was awake by a loud cry. He returned with both children in his arms. Bridget took her little girl from him, and then prepared a basin of food for the two of

them. There was not much conversation held while the feeding was going on. Bridget's attention was taken up with Susie, Charlie's with Paul; but when a last spoonful had been given to each child, talking began again. Charlie commenced:

'There,' he cried, putting Paul to stand on the table, and straightening his little frock, 'there's the prince of young 'uns for you! Charlie's own little man! What, you scamp! is it my eyes you want to poke out, after the fine breakfast I've just given you? No, you don't. Take your bits of fingers out of that, will you! Ay, put them in my mouth, do; and couldn't I crunch them up like so many sparrows' legs, if I'd a mind! now, couldn't I? You knows I could. Bridget, look at him, laughing all over his face. And do you hear how he cooes and crows? He's trying to talk. Ain't he a sharp young 'un, and not ten months old yet?' and Charlie took him once more on his knee, and covered him with kisses.

'He's so merry,' said Bridget; 'I've noticed him often. When he's not crying, he's always laughing, or else just ready to burst out a-laughing the moment anyone looks at him, or speaks to him. Now, it's quite the differ with little Susie here. She's nigh two years old, but I never can, and I never could, get so much as a smile on her bit of a face; and as to laugh, I'm beginning to think that she don't know how.'

'P'raps she don't find that there's much to laugh at,' suggested Charlie, eyeing the pale, thin, solemn-looking child on Bridget's knee commiseratingly.

'She's as much to laugh at as Paul, anyhow,' said Bridget, stroking her little girl's hair as she spoke.

'I don't know that,' observed Charlie musingly. He was thinking of the great difference between Nelly and Bridget. 'Paul has all he wants; leastways,' he added with a sigh, 'he had till last night.'

'Don't you think she's mighty pretty?' suddenly exclaimed Bridget, turning Susie's little face round for Charlie's inspection. 'She's *very* small. I've seen many a child of twelve months old double her size. But I think she couldn't be prettier, noways; don't you? Look at her sweet blue eyes, and her fair hair, and her dear bit of a white face.'

'I think she's fine,' replied Charlie; 'rather sad-looking



like, but very pretty. And so is Paul. *He* ain't small for his age. He is just first-rate. He's very white, like Susie ; but he ain't got blue eyes. They're brown, like Nelly's.'

'He's the image of his mammy altogether,' observed Bridget.

'All the better,' replied Charlie. 'If he grows up like dear Nelly, in looks as in everything else, he'll do fine. She used to like him washed of a morning. Have you got a bit of soap ?'

Bridget laughed.

'Is it soap I'd be buying,' she cried, 'and me wanting bread? No, no, lad ; my soap-days are over these three years gone by. Dip the corner of that rag in the bucket, and wipe his pretty face. What more does he want ?'

Charlie was thinking. Presently he said :

'There's a nice bit of soap in our room yonder, Bridget ; and there are all our bits of things, and some little clothes that Nell made for the baby. They should be brought down here. Will you go for them? I don't feel as if I could.'

'No, no, honey,' she replied at once ; 'of course you don't. I understand it all. I'll bring your things down for you ; and don't you go near the room again. It will only fret you.'

'Thank you,' he said, stifling a sob that rose in his throat. 'You're my only friend, Bridget, and I'm so grateful. I'll do all I can for you, depend upon it. You're not going out this morning, are you ?'

She groaned.

'Look at my poor eye,' she replied. 'Where'd be the use of my asking charity with a face like this? Folks would think I'd been fighting, and I wouldn't get a farthing out of them. No ; I'll stay at home to-day, and take care of the children.'

'Then I'll look after some coal first thing, or you'll all be frozen,' he said. 'The fire won't last another ten minutes. You'll take great care of little Paul while I'm gone, won't you, Bridget? He'll kick on the floor quiet enough ; and if he cries, just toss him up and talk to him a bit. I must look sharp after a job or two, to put some more coppers in my pocket. We've eaten half the loaf and all the butter.'

Well, I'll run off for that coal. Here, Paul, you lie quiet there. No, no ; you mustn't cry. I'll be back again in a minute or two. You'll have to take him, Bridget. He's squeezing up his bit of a face to make a row.'

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## CHAPTER V.

'For the poor shall never cease out of the land ; therefore I command thee, saying : Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land.'—DEUT. xv. 11.

THREE o'clock in the afternoon. Charlie was standing in one of the busy streets of the city gazing absently around him. He was more gloomy and dispirited than ever ; for, in addition to his great trouble in the loss of his dear friend, he had experienced a series of disappointments all the morning that had alike wearied him in body and mind and increased his distress tenfold. He was tired out with running hither and thither soliciting employment ; tired of seeking, tired of asking. He had never spent such a day ; for in spite of his most strenuous endeavours, here was twilight already gathering, and not one halfpenny had he earned ; nor had his repeated cry, 'Please, spare a copper !' been once successful. And this, too, at a time when all the responsibility of being little Paul's sole protector was weighing so heavily upon him, and making him feel capable of doing so much, if the opportunity would only occur. The opportunity was not going to occur *that* day, at all events. So Charlie concluded about three o'clock.

'It's all along of that herring and that half-quarter of eightpenny,' he thought dejectedly. 'What did I want with them? Why couldn't I let them be? The extravagance has turned my luck. And Paul ought to have a ha'porth of skim for his tea too, and here I haven't a copper to get it. If I'd have known how I was going to earn nothing all day, I'd have been very sorry to spend fourpence in coal this morning. I made *too* sure. Well, there's plenty of fire, anyhow ; and there's the bread ; that's two things to be thankful for, as Nell used to say. Poor Nell !'

It was very cold. The snow had been falling heavily all

the morning. It was not lying sparkling and pure, beautifying everything it touched, but black with the smuts from thousands of chimneys; and the streets were wet and slippery with the tread of thousands of feet, and the air was biting, and the clouds above were dark and thick, and all looked dreary and hopeless; and it seemed to Charlie, as he paused and glanced around, that life itself was just as dreary and just as hopeless. *His* life had only one bright speck in it just then, and that bright speck was baby Paul. But he had no halfpenny to get him the skim for his tea; that was a great trouble. With quivering lips and moist eyes he drew a long sigh, and then he limped wearily on. He was getting footsore. About four o'clock he sat down to rest upon the steps of a house he was passing. He had not been here long when his attention was caught by hearing a violent and painful cough; and, looking up, he saw an old woman pausing on the pavement just before him. It was she who was coughing; and a terrible cough she seemed to have, for it shook the whole of her body, and very soon she was so exhausted that she quite clung to some railings for support.

'You are regular done up, ma'am,' said Charlie, after watching her for a few seconds in silence. 'Come and sit down a bit by me. You're not fit to get on as you are.'

The old woman sank down beside him, but it was in vain that she tried to speak. In addition to her thick, choking cough, she seemed to have great difficulty in getting her breath, for she was quite gasping. Charlie began to think what a very good thing it was that he could draw his breath so easily and freely. What would become of baby Paul if he had to choke and gasp like this poor old woman? He felt quite sorry for her; so sorry, that when another fit of coughing shook a piece of paper out of her hand on to the pavement, he jumped down and picked it up.

'Here it is, ma'am,' he said, as he gave it to her and peered into her tearful eyes. 'You could never have stooped to get it yourself. You seem awful bad. What makes you choke like that?'

'The—asthma—love,' she replied with difficulty.

This word, of course, was quite unintelligible to Charlie. What 'asthma' was, he had no idea, except that it must be something very dreadful to make one choke and gasp like

this poor old woman ; so he opened his grey eyes still wider, and ejaculated gravely :

‘ Oh ! ’ in a few seconds adding : ‘ Can’t you get rid of it ? ’

‘ Of—what, love ? ’ she asked, with another cough.

‘ Of that—what you’ve got that makes you choke,’ he replied.

‘ Oh—the asthma,’ she said, wiping her eyes with her apron. ‘ No—there’s no such luck ’ (cough) ‘ as getting rid of it ’ (cough, cough). ‘ It’s stuck to me now these twenty years ’ (cough, cough) ; ‘ and I expect when it goes ’ (cough), ‘ I’ll be going along with it ’ (cough, cough, cough).

‘ You’d better not talk,’ said Charlie, taking his seat again, ‘ or you’ll choke altogether.’ And then he sat wondering what dreadful foe this ‘ asthma ’ could be, and what a long time it had stayed with this poor woman, and where it would go to at last, and why she would go with it ! As he could find no satisfactory explanation to these perplexities, he very soon dismissed them from his mind, and glanced into her face instead. Although she clearly belonged to the courts and alleys, there was an air of would-be respectability about her that was interesting to him, because it reminded him somehow of poor Nelly. Her clothes, though much worn, were well mended and clean ; a nicely-goffered cap was showing under her old straw bonnet, a tidy black shawl was round her shoulders, and a big white apron gave her a wholesome, comfortable appearance.

‘ I must get on,’ she managed to say presently. ‘ I’ve my way to make to the parish office, for my weekly two shillings, and it’s a good step yet, and I’m late as it is. Ah ! this hard winter is a bad time for me. What with the asthma and the rheumatic aches, it isn’t much comfort I get out of my life. Good-bye, love. God bless you, and may He look after you when you’re as old as me.’

The poor old woman hobbled on, and Charlie still sat listlessly thinking. By-and-by a carriage came rolling along, and it stopped right before him. The footman jumped from the box, and running up the steps where he was sitting, bade him gruffly, ‘ take himself off.’ He immediately drew on one side, while the bell was rung with a loud peal ; the carriage-door opened, and then two ladies richly attired in satins and furs disappeared into the house, the carriage rolled away, and

all was quiet as before. Not for long, though. Barely five minutes had passed, when the house-door was again opened and the footman came out. He had a lantern in his hand, and he began peering about the pavement, as though something were lost. Something, in fact, was; for as he spied Charlie leaning against the railings, he cried:

‘Have you seen a purse lying about here? Missis thinks she dropped it getting out of the carriage. But no, of course you haven’t, or you’d have made off with it, long ago.’

Charlie, blue and shivering as he was, had sufficient feeling left to be roused to indignation by this speech.

‘Would I?’ he replied. ‘Speak for yourself—with your mean hints.’

The footman’s reply was a careless, though somewhat smart box on the ears as, considering the search fruitless, he returned to the house.

As Charlie heard the door again close, and found himself once more alone, hot tears sprang to his eyes.

‘What right had that fellow to cuff me?’ he thought bitterly, rubbing his poor cheek; ‘‘cause I’m small and ragged, and cold and hungry, I suppose—while he is warm and well-off, and altogether ‘spectable. Oh! how I do hate ‘spectable folks. If I was one of them, I wouldn’t;—but it’s so aggravating to see them with all they want, while one’s nothing at all; so I hate them—that I do!’

The lamplighter drew near just then, and Charlie watched while he lighted a lamp that was quite near—not a yard away. When the man had passed on, out of sight, he sat looking at the shadow of the lamp-post that was now thrown broad and long upon the trodden snow. By degrees his eyes travelled to the light glimmering at the top, and he noticed that it was falling full upon one of the windows of the house. In a little while, from absently wondering what he saw through the window, he felt a sudden curiosity to find out, so he swarmed lightly up the lamp-post and perched himself upon the iron bar on a level with the lamp. He could see into the window now, quite distinctly. Oh, what a comfortable room! There were pictures on the walls in bright gold frames, and a pretty carpet on the floor, and furniture such as he had never seen, except in shop windows. And seated in a rocking-chair, by a blazing fire, was a woman, in

what appeared to him beautiful clothes, and in her arms was something that in an instant riveted his attention—for it was a baby, and he was taking an especial interest in all babies now. Had he not one of his own? But this baby was attired in dainty lace and tinted cashmere, and its skin was like a rose-leaf, and its hair glistened in the firelight like threads of gold, and it was crowing with happiness over a gaily-painted toy in its little hands.

Charlie felt a bitter pang of envy as he looked and contrasted this happy baby with his destitute little one at home; and soon such angry indignant feelings were aroused in his breast that he actually made a face at it, and muttered:

‘You ugly, ugly thing! You ain’t pretty a bit. It’s only your clothes that are grand—not *you*. You should just see my Paul! He’s something like, he is; if he’d your clothes on, why he’d look just lovely—not a bit like you, you ugly thing!’

He did not like to look at this baby in its beauty and happiness, so he came down the lamp-post, and stood dejectedly in the snow, thinking bitterly.

‘Paul has got *nothing*—nothing at all!’ he exclaimed, as he brought his reverie to a close and hot tears filled his eyes. ‘He’s not *one* thing, Paul hasn’t. He had a fine daddy—poor Nelly’s William! but he has got drowned in the sea. That is a very bad thing. And then he had a sweet mammy—he couldn’t have had a better; but she has got drowned in the river. That is another very bad thing; though to be sure, she is well out of it. But Paul’s got nothing now—not *one* thing. Poor little chap! It *is* a shame!’

Just then something sparkling in the gutter caught his eye. Stooping down, he found it was the steel clasp of a purse. A heavy purse too, so he found as he held it in his dirty, cold, little hands—a very heavy purse. His heart beat quickly. It was a sore temptation. What wouldn’t the contents of this purse buy for Paul? But had he right to it? Whose was it? He had found it. Ah, yes! but he knew well it belonged to the lady who had dropped it in getting out of her carriage. Well, but suppose it did—she had plenty. Look at the house she lived in, at the clothes she wore. Look at her baby (for doubtless it was her baby); was there *one* thing it wanted? And Paul—poor wee Paul!—had nothing. Surely he could keep this purse—that had been

thrown in his path—not for himself, but for Paul. The blood rushed to his cheek, and all hot and gushing, seemed to fill every vein in his body. He walked quickly on ; but only for a few yards. Then a patient, gentle face sprang up before him, and seemed forcibly to arrest his footsteps. ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ said a sweet quiet voice. He started. Looking round wildly, he felt as if Nelly herself had come and whispered these words in his ear. No—he wouldn’t steal ; as he had told Bridget—not a halfpenny that was not honestly his should go towards bringing Paul up. What ! feed Paul—Nelly’s baby—with stolen money ? Why, he should expect it to choke him ! He wondered he could have thought of such a thing ! His great temptation was over.

He walked firmly back to the house. Yes—and he rang the bell as loud as he could ; for he felt indignant with himself for his few seconds of wavering ; and it was a relief to pull something—even a bell. And when the sharp-tempered footman answered the noisy summons in some surprise, he still further relieved his feeling by throwing the purse right in his face ; and then, afraid of the consequences of this rash act, he took to his heels and ran off as fast as he could, without so much as a word of explanation. Quite away, in another street, he stopped ; and once more indulged in vain regrets and sad reflections for some two or three moments. He was thinking still of the beautiful baby.

‘It’ll have all it wants,’ he thought ; ‘it will be getting its tea soon—a lovely tea. And it will eat it all, I know it will ; and p'raps cry for some more, and get it. The greedy thing ! What kind of a tea will Paul get ? I’ve no skim for him to-night. I bought a whole pen’orth this morning, but I gave Susie the half of it. I wish I hadn’t ! And I spent a whole penny in that half-quarter of eightpenny—eh, I wish I hadn’t ! I wish I’d that penny now.’ So two or three seconds passed ; then he started up, exclaiming resolutely : ‘I don’t care. He *shall* have his skim. I won’t go back till I’ve got a penny from somewhere.’

Quickly he again made his way to the busy thoroughfares, and took up his petition of : ‘Spare a copper ; just a copper, please, sir !’

But, alas, no one could ‘spare a copper.’ It was far too

cold and damp to stop and unbutton great-coats, or to rummage in pockets for loose halfpence to give to unfortunate, destitute children. And then, there was so much imposture about. No wonder that people were obdurate in turning a deaf ear to street beggary. In so many cases, to relieve was only to encourage sloth and vice of all kinds; and if a deserving case here and there *did* happen to be overlooked, whose fault was it?

Another half-hour passed. Charlie was sobbing with cold and disappointment. He would have to go home with empty pockets after all. He was standing irresolute once more, this time in one of the busiest streets of the city, trying to make up his mind to face Paul without the much-desired 'skim,' when, raising his eyes, he caught sight of the old woman with the bad cough, at the other side of the road. She was standing on the curbstone, evidently hesitating about crossing, for the traffic was very great. After watching her for a few seconds, he ran nimbly between the carts and other vehicles, and standing by her side, said:

'Are you frightened to cross, ma'am?'

She was breathing very heavily again, and it was with great difficulty she told him that she had already slipped twice on the half-frozen snow, that she had come much farther down the road than she should have done, because she could not find a safe place to cross, and that she did not believe she'd ever get home that night, but die in the streets.

'You look very bad,' said Charlie, wiping his own tears away. 'That asthma's got hold of you again. I hope it won't choke you; but I shouldn't be surprised. You're dreadful cold, too. You're shaking all over—and so am I. Must you go to the other side of the road before you can get home?'

She signified 'Yes.'

'Then,' said Charlie, 'the sooner you get across the better, if you don't want to be froze. Come on! Now's the time! Quick, before that 'bus!'

So saying he dragged her into the middle of the road before she knew where she was. The omnibus, however, had been quicker than he; the driver had to pull up his horses while they got out of the way, so had the carter of a



big lorry, and so had the coachman of a handsome carriage and pair; such shouting, and calling, and confusion there was before they arrived safely on the opposite pavement; and the poor old woman, utterly exhausted and fighting for breath, threw her arms round a lamp-post and clung to it for support. Charlie felt quite frightened.

'I knew you'd choke,' he said, as he watched her. 'Do you think you're going to die?'

A paroxysm of coughing came on just then, in the intervals of which she got her hand on to his shoulder, and clutching him desperately, said:

'Don't—leave—me!'

'No,' said Charlie, 'I won't. I've no call to hurry home, for I've nothing to take; and Bridget will keep Paul warm by the fire. No, I won't leave you. Just you look out and don't choke, that's all; and I'll stay with you as long as you like.'

She gasped something that sounded like 'Bless you!' and then stood for some moments leaning partly on him, and partly against the lamp-post, until she felt sufficiently recovered to be able to advance a few footsteps.

'Is this the way to where you live?' asked Charlie, as they moved slowly along.

'Yes' (cough), 'it's a good step' (cough, cough). 'I've come such a round' (cough) 'through being afeared' (cough, cough).

'Never mind talking,' cried Charlie. 'You've work enough to get along without that. Keep all your breath. I'm sure you want it. Just point out the way we're to go, and I'll see you safe to your door; for I don't believe you would ever get there by yourself.'

To this she made no reply, heartily agreeing with him that she had work enough to get along without talking; and so they strolled on together. But they had to go very slowly, dreadfully slowly it seemed to Charlie. And they had to stop every now and then, while the old woman coughed. And she leaned more and more heavily upon him, and his shoulder began to ache.

'Are we very far off now?' he ventured to ask at last, when they had been walking for some time, and were approaching one of the poorer parts of the city.

'It's a shame to keep you!' she gasped; 'but don't leave me, love. You'll be old yourself one of these days—and——'

'I'm not going to leave you,' said Charlie, sighing in spite of himself. 'I was only wondering if it was much farther off yet, 'cause it's cold walking so slow. And—let me come to the other side, will you? This shoulder has had about enough. Let us give the other a turn.'

The exchange was quickly made, and she tried to stammer some words of gratitude; but experienced so much difficulty in doing so, that she soon yielded to Charlie's persuasions to be quite silent. Up another street (that was rather a steep ascent, and tried the old woman's breathing-powers so much that Charlie several times stood speechless with consternation, quite believing that her last hour had come), then along a narrow road, skirted on each side by the dwellings of the poor, until she stopped before a cellar, and managed to say:

'This is it. There are six steps.'

It was now too dark to see. Charlie counted the steps one by one as he led her down, and when they got to the last, and she fell upon it quite exhausted, he felt for the latch of the door, and asked:

'Is it locked? It won't open?'

'Locked!' she ejaculated.

'Is the key in your pocket?' he asked, after listening for a moment to her laboured breathing. 'Shall I get it out, and open the door? Never mind talking; just nod your head if you mean "yes."'

The assent thus given, he searched for her pocket, and took out the key. Then he opened the door. All was quite dark inside. He could see nothing.

'Maybe you can find your own way to a chair,' he said, helping her to rise. 'If you could tell me where to feel for a match, I'd strike a light for you; and then we could see how you are.'

He was following her in as he spoke, and soon he could tell by her breathing that she had sat down somewhere near him, and he felt her hand putting a candle and a box of matches into his. He struck a light, and looked about him. The cellar was beautifully neat. The flags, cracked and broken in many places, were scrubbed perfectly clean. A wooden bedstead stood in one corner, with the bed neatly

made, and covered with a patchwork quilt of wonderfully gay colours. A chest of drawers, a small table, and three chairs comprised the furniture. The mantelpiece was gay with painted crockery. The hearthstone was whitened; and the fender and grate were bright with black lead. All this Charlie took in with a rapid glance, and thought as rapidly: '*Our* room used to look like this before Nelly got ill, and so poor.'

Then he turned to his companion. She was sitting in a rocking-chair by the side of the fireplace, gasping and panting still.

'You look shocking bad,' he cried.

'I'm so cold,' she said, beginning to cry. 'I think I'm frozen. I've no feeling in my hands and feet.'

Charlie set the candle down on the mantelpiece, and shut the door. Then he said, consolingly:

'Don't cry. I think you're a bit better. You don't choke quite so much as you did; and you'll soon be warm.' Then, looking at the empty grate, he added: 'If you'll tell me where to find your coal and stuff, I'll make you a bit of a fire. It's *that* you want.'

She was coughing again violently. As soon as she could speak, she said:

'There's a door, love—right behind you—by the bed. Open it. The coal and chip are laid on the floor, to the right' (cough, cough). 'Oh, if I could only get a cup of hot tea!'

'You shall have it right away,' replied Charlie, returning from his search with his hands full of coal and chip. He soon had a cheerful fire blazing; and then he caught sight of a water-tap fixed in the wall by the door, and immediately filled the little black kettle and placed it on the fire to boil. 'There,' he exclaimed, turning to the old woman; 'that's the style, ain't it? My! how you *do* choke! Is that the "asthma" singing-like in your chest? Why, it's just like Joe Scruggin's fiddle. He is a chap that lives in the top room of the bottom house in our court; and he's blind with one eye, and the other ain't no use to him, so he's a dog and a fiddle to get his bread. If he'd an asthma inside of him, just a trifle louder than yours maybe, he might leave his fiddle at home, for he'd beat it hollow at squeaking. Do you never get rid of that asthma now?'

'Oh yes, love!' she replied. 'It's the cold and the walk that's brought it on; that's all. It'll leave me—after a bit—when I get warm.'

'Then the sooner you get warm the better,' said Charlie. 'Here, let me push your chair closer. You're a good weight too. Where are your feet? Let me lift them on to the fender for you. Now, how do you like that?'

'God bless you, love!' she said fervently. 'You're a fine lad. What's your name?'

'Charlie,' was the prompt reply. 'And what is yours, ma'am?'

'Mine is Vogan,' she replied; 'Mrs. Vogan—poor old Mrs. Vogan! I was a bright young thing once, though you'll maybe find it hard to credit it. It was a strapping young fellow who made me Mrs. Vogan; and then I'd four dear children. But they are all gone now, love. Old Mrs. Vogan, without kith or kin—that's me.'

'Did you find the parish-office?' asked Charlie, not so much from curiosity as from a desire to change the subject of conversation, for he had noticed that the old woman's eyes were full of tears.

'Find it!' she repeated. 'Seeing I've turned up there regular ever since I saw sixty, nigh ten years ago, I ought to be well able to find it.'

'What do you go there for every week?' he asked.

'For relief, dear,' she said. 'Two shillings I get there every Monday morning. I'd starve without them. And, praise the good Lord! the kind gentleman has put me on an extra sixpence while the snow lasts.'

'Two shillings!' repeated Charlie thoughtfully. 'Does a gentleman at that office give away two shillings to them that wants them bad?'

'Ay, does he!' cried Mrs. Vogan, with another cough. 'Leastways he does to them that wants them bad, and *deserves them*. And hasn't he put me on an extra sixpence now that winter is so cruel and biting? Bless him! bless him!—an extra sixpence. Won't that keep me in fire all the winter through?—fivepence for coal, and a penny for chips. An extra sixpence!—bless him!—he gave me an extra sixpence!'

Mrs. Vogan repeated this last clause several times, though

more to herself than to Charlie. He, on his side, was paying no attention. He was standing gazing absently into the fire, completely occupied with his own thoughts. Presently he said :

'I didn't think a gentleman at that there parish-office would give away two shillings, else I'd have gone and asked him for them ; for I want them *right* bad.'

'I don't think he'd have given them to you, love,' replied Mrs. Vogan. 'You see *two shillings* is a lot to give away, week by week, unless there's some good cause why they should be wanted. Now, I get them because I'm old, and sick, and respectable ; but *you* are young, and strong——'

'And not 'spectable,' interrupted Charlie. 'I never was 'spectable. I should like to be ; but I'm not.' He held up one dirty little naked foot after the other ; then he pointed to his ragged trousers and jacket, opening with his grimy fingers various rents that revealed the white skin underneath, and shaking his head gravely, he said once more : 'No ; I'm miles and miles off being 'spectable, I am. The gentleman wouldn't have given *me* two shillings, catch him ! Well, I don't care ! I can do without them ; but I *do* want twopence. Do you think he'd have given me twopence if I'd gone and asked him for it, and told him I wanted it dreadful bad ?'

'I don't know, love. He might ; there's no telling ; though, to be sure, you're young to be in want of a couple of coppers. Good lads should be able to earn a crust one way or another. Old folks, like poor me, can earn nothing. But good young ones shouldn't be hard up for a penny in a great city like this, where there are no end of odd jobs they can do. And I'm sure you're good, love.'

'Well, off and on, p'r'aps I am,' he replied. 'I was precious near being very bad a while ago—precious near. Ain't it a pity it's so mighty easy to be bad, and so rare and hard to be good ? Why couldn't it be the other way about now ? I often think of that.'

'Eh, love,' she replied with a smile ; 'if that were so, we'd all be angels before our time. But what were you near being bad about ?'

He shook his head. 'Never mind,' he replied ; 'I didn't do it. That's quite enough.'

'Well, you've been very good to me,' said old Mrs. Vogan ; 'and I'll answer for it there's not much harm in you. Why, I'd have died in the street, I verily believe, if it hadn't been for you ; the asthma took me that bad. I never remember it gripping me harder. I never could have got home by myself.'

'Why, it is nearly gone now,' suddenly cried Charlie.

'What has gone, love ?'

'The asthma,' he replied ; 'the squeaking has gone from your chest, and you don't choke a bit.'

'It is going off,' she said ; 'the rest and the warmth has done me good.'

The kettle boiled over just then. Charlie lifted it on to the hob, then he turned to Mrs. Vogan and said :

'What can I do for you now ?'

'You shall make some tea for us both,' she replied ; 'for I'm sure you want it as much as me. See, on the shelf in that corner, love, there's my little teapot—move it gently ; it's older than you by many a year. And there are cups and spoons too. Put them on the table here. That's a good lad ! And now in the cupboard yonder—that is right—there's a bit of tea in the yellow jar, isn't there ? and some sugar in the brown mug, and a sup of milk in the blue jug ; bring them here. Now, where's the loaf ? Ah, there it is, on the shelf above you ; and a bit of butter in yon green saucer. Dear, dear ! but it's odd, too, to have a lad about me again.'

Charlie did not notice these last words, nor the sigh that accompanied them, nor the glistening tears that Mrs. Vogan wiped from her eyes. He was thinking how beautifully neat and clean everything was in this old woman's little cellar—how different to the dirt and untidiness and misery of Bridget's abode ! But then Bridget was not 'spectable,' no more than he ; and consequently she could not be expected to love cleanliness and neatness. This poor old woman was very 'spectable.' Her bright little home, her clean face, her white apron, all said so in language that could not be mistaken.

Charlie sighed. He felt he was a long way off being 'spectable' himself. He would like to be, because, having experienced, during the many months he had spent with

Nelly, the comforts to be obtained from a free use of soap and water, he felt a strong disinclination to return to the wretchedness of the dirt of the not 'spectable.'

'It don't matter so much for me,' he said to himself; 'cause, not being born 'spectable, I've no call to grumble. But there is that Paul. I ought to bring *him* up 'spectable, like his mammy. Bridget's place isn't fit for *him*. Why, he'll grow up no better than I am; and he with *such* a mammy.'

He remained, his foot on the fender, gazing into the fire, thus soliloquizing, until aroused by Mrs. Vogan, who, having so far recovered herself as to be able to leave her chair and make some tea, now sat down again, saying:

'You look very grave all at once, lad; what is it?'

'Nothing,' he replied; 'I was only having a bit of a think. I've just had a great trouble, I have. I've lost Nelly. She went and got into the water somehow, and she drowned—drowned quite dead—and lost. I'll never see her again.'

Old Mrs. Vogan's expressions of sympathy were both profuse and genuine.

'Who was she—this poor Nelly?' she asked, when she had heard all about the sad occurrence. 'Your mother? And yet I suppose not, or you wouldn't be calling her by her name. Was she——'

But Charlie interrupted.

'My mother!' he exclaimed. 'I should think not. Why, do you think Nell would ever have been the mother of a chap like *me*? Not she, indeed! No; she wasn't *my* mammy; but she *is* Paul's.'

'Paul's,' repeated Mrs. Vogan; 'and who is Paul, love?'

'Who is Paul—who is my little bit of a sweet Paul?' he exclaimed. 'Why, he's a baby, Nelly's baby—the sweetest, prettiest, young bit of a baby that the good Lord ever made. That's who Paul is.'

'Bless him!' said the old woman, in a voice choked with emotion; 'and so the Lord has taken his mammy, poor little chap! A baby without a mammy! I think that is a sight to make a stone weep, I do.'

'I must be going,' suddenly exclaimed Charlie. 'He'll be wanting me; and if he gets crying, as he always does

when he don't get what he wants, it's as like as not Bridget will be cross with him. She isn't a bit patient, isn't Bridget. I've seen her give Susie many a shake when she's been angered with her. Paul mustn't be shook. I must go.'

'Not before you've had a nice cup of tea, love,' replied Mrs. Vogan, seizing the teapot and pouring out the hot liquid; 'and a big piece of bread and butter too. I couldn't let you go without that, after seeing me home so good and kind. Come, draw that chair, and set-to; if your looks speak the truth, you're hungered to death.'

Charlie was very hungry, and the tea and bread and butter looked very tempting. He drew the chair to the table, as directed, and sitting down, raised the cup to his lips; but before they had time to sip, it was down again, and looking with glistening eyes at his old companion, he said coaxingly:

'I say, missis, lend me a bit of an old bottle; I want to take this tea home. There is that Paul; maybe he'll like it, though he's not used to it.'

'Drink it up, love,' was her reply. 'Babies won't thrive on tea; it isn't fit for them. It's milk they should have.'

'Ay,' he cried; 'it's a pint of skim I should get for him; but I haven't the coppers, and I can't get it without. And he must have something,' he added piteously.

'Of course he must, love,' she replied; 'but I wouldn't give him skim, Charlie. He'll never be a fine lad on that. Get him a pint of good milk, dear, and drink your tea, and don't fret 'cause you've no coppers. I'll give you three, and welcome. You've earned more than that, if I had it; but I'm a poor woman, Charlie—a poor, sick old woman.'

'I don't want three,' he cried, brimful of joy. 'Just two—you give me two—that is all I want. And you shan't lose them either. The first time I've a bit of luck, I'll bring them back to you. Eh, but I *am* glad! Paul will get his supper after all.'

He made a good tea after that, and being in excellent spirits, chatted pleasantly. Then he received the twopence from Mrs. Vogan, and once more assuring her that she should not lose it, but that he would bring it back the first time he was rich enough to spare it, he bade her a hearty good-night.

It was about nine o'clock when he arrived at O'Brian's



Court. He found Bridget crouching over a low fire, Paul crying on her knee, and Susie asleep on the sofa. The room was quite dark. It was only by the faint light of the few glowing embers in the little grate that he made his way to her side. She was dozing; but waking up suddenly as he took little Paul from her arms, she exclaimed:

'It's thankful I am to see you back, lad. The young uns have been that cross—first one and then t'other. Not a minute's peace have I had since the dark fell. Such children for crying I never did see! I got Susie off to sleep about half an hour ago, but this Paul of yours won't be coaxed nohow.'

'He is cold,' said Charlie, kissing the small head resting on his shoulder; 'he's like ice. Feel his bits of fingers; why, they're stiff again. Here, Bridget, take him for a minute, while I run for his milk. He is to have no more skim, an old woman said so. There, old chap! don't cry, Charlie won't be long.'

Seizing a small can from the mantelpiece, he ran off, while Paul, from Bridget's knee, roared louder than ever. Not until he was in Charlie's arms, being fed with the hot milk, did he allow himself to be consoled. Then he nestled comfortably against the loving breast of his young protector, drew his last sob, and shed his last tear.

'Poor little chap!' said Charlie, when the milk was nearly all taken; 'he'll sleep after this. But I say, Bridget, isn't it a shame? He hasn't one thing; not *one*.'

He was thinking again of the beautiful baby he had seen through the window, of the bright fire to keep it warm, of its dainty garments, of the good food that kept its tiny limbs so round, of the gay toy to amuse it; and looking pitifully upon the white tear-stained face, upon the rags, the neglect and misery of the poor little child in his arms, he said once more:

'No; he hasn't *one* thing! The Lord didn't give him much to begin with; but they are all gone now. His fine daddy (for Nell always said her William was a first-rate fellow), his sweet mammy (and there couldn't be anyone sweeter than Nell), but they're both gone. Paul's lost everything. What are you sighing for, Bridget?'

Bridget's eyes were full of tears.

'I don't know, love,' she said wearily, drawing her ragged shawl around her; 'maybe for one thing, and maybe for another. I'm cold and tired, and my head aches bad. I've been bathing it off and on with cold water all day, but the pain is in it yet.'

'Poor Bridget!' cried Charlie commiseratingly. 'What a shame of Tom to hurt you so! Has he been home yet?'

'No, love,' she replied with another sigh; 'not he. And he won't be till the White Swan closes. That is where he is; spending what would keep us warm and comfortable in taking his senses away. I wonder what the good Lord thinks of them that grows rich in the trade of making and selling stuff that turns men into brutes, and sets them starving and beating and breaking the hearts of those that love them best in the world, or, leastways, that *would* do, if they'd only let them. I know what I'd do with them, and their nasty stuff too, if I'd only the chance. I'd—Hark! there he is—fumbling for the latch. Quick, Charlie! into the closet with Paul and Susie. He's worse than ever to-night. Hear how he kicks and thumps! God help me! for there's no one else! Are you safe in, Charlie? Keep the children quiet. I *must* open the door. All right, Tom, honey, I'm coming.' And a second later the drunken form of Tom Mulligan rolled into the room.

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## CHAPTER VI.

'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and, look, what he layeth out shall be paid him again.'—PROV. xix. 17.

IT was Christmas Eve. Nelly had for many weeks been free from care and pain. The little room where she had passed so many sad and anxious hours was occupied by strangers, and Charlie and baby Paul were still sheltered by Bridget's scanty but freely-offered hospitality. A great change had taken place in Charlie during the time that had slipped slowly by since the evening when Nelly had gone out—alas! not to return. The feeling of responsibility, of being left alone, quite alone, to think, plan, and provide, not only for himself, but for a dearly-loved, helpless baby, had chased

from him every trace of the happy carelessness of hopeful boyhood, and imprinted upon his small face a gravity and anxiety far beyond his years. And Charlie was *very* anxious. As he expressed it : ' All his luck seemed to have gone with poor Nell.' Try as he would, halfpence dropped but slowly into his pocket. He has been in the streets from early morn until late at night, sweeping crossings, soliciting odd jobs, or begging from the passers-by, as hard as he could, and yet he has never brought home more than enough to keep him and Paul from actual starvation ; and he has even often been dependent upon Bridget's kindness for ' his ha'p'orth of skim and crust of bread.' The bright picture he had conjured up of having a cosy little home for himself and Paul seemed very far off, and instead he had the dirt, the untidiness, and the wretchedness of Bridget's room, and the constant fear of coming face to face with Tom in one of his infuriated moods, and of being either subjected to his violence, or perhaps ruthlessly turned into the streets to perish in the biting cold. And it was dreadfully cold. Winter, that year, was very, very hard. Blocks of ice were floating down the tossing river, fierce biting winds were holding revel over the land, and snow from time to time was falling unceasingly, and lying in heavy masses on all sides. :

The cathedral clock had just struck the half-hour of four that afternoon of Christmas Eve. It had been dark for the last hour, for the sky was heavy and black with snow-clouds. The lamplighters had done their work. The streets were bright with the glare of gas, shops were brilliantly illuminated, the thoroughfares were thronged with hundreds of foot-passengers, and the roads were almost impassable with the traffic of hundreds of vehicles. Limp, limp, down the street came a weary little figure, with a burden in its arms, that it was holding in a close clinging embrace. It paused just by the cathedral, and it looked with two weary eyes at the brilliant shops opposite, and at the busy hurrying masses. It was jostled first on one side and then on the other as men and women bustled past it, and the confused hum of living multitudes fell upon its ears, bearing evidence to the reality of a dense and active population surrounding it on every side ; but in spite of this, had it been wandering upon the untrodden snows of the far north, or upon the burning

sands of the great desert, it could not have felt more utterly solitary and helpless.

Poor little Charlie! He was shivering with cold, for his rags scarce held together over his blue numb limbs. And he was faint with hunger: for he had not tasted food that day. Twice only had his piteous plea for 'a ha'penny' been responded to. Once at about ten o'clock in the morning, and again at perhaps two in the afternoon. But each time he had exchanged the small coin as soon as possible for a cup of hot cocoa to warm Paul's freezing blood, and hush his piercing cries. The child was quiet now; for, wearied with sobbing, he had at last fallen to sleep.

Charlie had done all he could to shield him from the cruel cold. He had wound round his little form every article of clothing that his poor mother had possessed; and the old red shawl was over all, covering head, and face, and feet. No one would have supposed that the odd bundle the lad was carrying contained a baby, unless they had judged so from the care and tenderness with which he bore it. Charlie, as he stood just then gazing vacantly about him, was confused. A while ago he was desperate; but now hunger, cold, disappointment, and despair seem to have numbed his senses with his limbs. He was lame with chilblains, but he felt no pain. He was only very tired. He was so thankful that Paul was asleep. Those continual weary sobs of his had nearly driven him wild. He had walked miles since morning. He felt he could walk no farther. He had asked charity until his very throat seemed scratched with so much speaking, and his voice hoarse. He could ask no more. He must rest.

So he turned his back on the glitter of shops and lamps, and he slowly ascended the steps of the cathedral; and he crept along by the high-arched windows, until he sat down in a dark corner beneath one of them, and his head dropped on to his breast. Inside the stately temple strains from white-robed choristers were swelling through the vaulted roof. Praise was ascending to the divine Child of Christmas, to the great God-man, the anniversary of whose human birth the Christian universe delights to honour. The strains were touchingly sweet. They reached Charlie's ear as he crouched under the window, and somehow they bore his

thoughts far away from his present misery to the glories of the dream he had had the night Nelly was drowned. He was once more in that pleasant land of light and flowers, and she was standing before him, smiling and beautiful. He was putting out his hand to touch her, and was calling her attention to the fact that he had brought Paul to her, 'honest and 'spectable,' as she had left him, when a rude shake of his shoulder aroused him from his dangerous slumber. Looking up bewilderedly, he found Bridget bending over him, little Susie in her arms.

'Get up this minute, lad!' she cried. 'Have you no more sense than to be sleeping in the snow a night like this? I saw you from the other side of the road, standing scared-like under the gas-lamp. And I wondered what you were going to do up these steps; so I came to see. I've been all round the place searching for you. Thank God I've found you! Whatever put it into your head to be sleeping here? Come, get up!'

'Oh, Bridget!' he stammered, as she dragged him on to his feet. 'Just let me rest five minutes, and then I'll go with you wherever you like. I am *so* tired! Just five minutes, Bridget!'

'Not five seconds,' she replied. 'Here, give me the child. I can carry the two of them. And you catch hold of my dress and come along quick. Five minutes, indeed! Why, I'm only just in time.'

He was too tired either to ask her what she meant, or to resist her commands. Mechanically he let her take Paul from his arms, and he held on to her ragged dress while she led him quickly down the cathedral steps, and along the streets. He knew nothing until a blaze of light suddenly streamed before him, and he found himself in one of the cocoa-houses of the city. Bridget led him to a table, and they both sat down; and then two cups of hot, smoking cocoa were placed before them, and Bridget's voice said:

'There: that's my last twopence. Drink it up, Charlie boy, and eat the cob of bread; for you're dying for want of it, and I'm near as bad.'

Charlie had no idea how cold he was until he tried to raise the cup to his lips. Then he found that his hands were almost powerless; so he bent his head and sipped a

mouthful of the hot, sweet cocoa, and looking gratefully at Bridget, remarked that it was very good. It revived him wonderfully. He was soon able to rub his hands together, and to attack the cob of bread that was given with the cocoa for the sum of one penny; and the drowsy feeling quite left him, as Paul awoke and began to cry.

'He is hungry again,' said Charlie, taking him from Bridget. 'What a good thing I haven't drunk all the cocoa! I'll crumble some bread in what is left, and give it to him.'

'Lord help us,' exclaimed Bridget, who was sharing her scanty repast with little Susie, 'the young uns must be fed. But it comes hard to share victuals that one's inside is aching for, even with one's own. I could stow away half a dozen cups of this same cocoa, and as many cobs of bread; and here I haven't had much more than a hungry sparrow would take down in a wink and half. No more have you, Charlie. Is that the first you've eaten to-day?'

'Yes,' he replied; 'and thankful I am to get it. Paul likes it, Bridget; look how he clutches the spoon.'

'How have you managed to keep him warm all day?' she asked, after contemplating the little fellow for some moments in silence. 'I should have thought he'd have been froze long ago.'

'I took good care of that,' replied Charlie. 'I've kept rubbing him, and breathing on him, and holding him close to me. And then the fellows who are digging up the road by the big lamp yonder, have got a first-rate fire in a kind of an iron basket. I've had him 'longside of that off and on all through the day.'

'But has he had nothing to eat till now?' asked Bridget.

'Oh yes; he'd have been dead without. I've bought him a ha'p'orth of cocoa twice. It helped to keep the heat in him. Those two halfpennies are all I've made to-day,' he added despairingly. 'I haven't a farthing, Bridget—not one farthing.'

'No more have I,' she exclaimed bitterly. 'That twopence I paid away for what we've just eaten is all I had. My pocket's empty, Charlie—and the cupboard's empty at home, and the grate's empty. And Tom is drinking away all he's got at the White Swan. And it's a wonder to me if we're not all starved and froze by this time to-morrow night.'

To this Charlie made no reply. He had heard the same story so often, that it had ceased to trouble him. He was feeling pretty comfortable now. His hunger was appeased, if not satisfied. He was warm; and the large room so brilliantly lighted, with the big fire roaring in an ample grate just before him, seemed a perfect heaven after the dark and cold of the streets. Paul and Susie fell asleep, and Bridget and Charlie leaned back in their seats quietly resting. A sweet rest they were enjoying. They could have lingered there hour after hour; but this was too good to be possible. Just as the hand of the clock on the wall pointed to half-past six, an attendant came forward and told them that they had already been there a very long time, and that unless they wanted some more cocoa they must go out. More cocoa they indeed did want, but, alas! they had no money to pay for it.

‘Come on, Charlie!’ cried Bridget; ‘let us go and see if we can’t get another copper, and then we’ll come back.’

This was the only thing to be done; so with many a sigh they turned from the warmth and light, and, both holding their children in their arms, went out to face once more the bitter cold. They found it more biting than ever after that short sweet rest. The sharp wind swept through their ragged clothing, seeming to seize each limb, and vein, and muscle in a fierce grasp of ice. Their naked feet slipped in the well-trodden snow on the pavement, and their teeth chattered loudly as they again took up their cry: ‘Only a copper—just one copper, for the love of Heaven!’

But this was no time to search for loose halfpennies to bestow upon common street-beggars. And who was to know how much the pence so eagerly craved for were needed? Certainly not that old gentleman whom Charlie persistently followed down the whole street without even succeeding in attracting his attention; nor yet the jocular young swell, with eye-glass and cane, who briefly assured Bridget that he was on his way to the workhouse, and advised her strongly to go there too. Oh, it was weary work! And then their children awoke and began to cry; and those of the passers-by who condescended to notice them at all, did so angrily and indignantly, bidding them get home with the little ones; did they want them to freeze in their arms? ~~Seven~~ **Seven** o’clock

—eight o'clock—nine o'clock. Snow was falling heavily now, drifting here and there as the wind tossed it about. The throngs of people were as busy as ever. Shops were still full of eager purchasers, lavishly spending their silver and gold to do honour to the great fête of the morrow. In ball-room and theatre, pleasure was decked in her brightest colours. Light were the steps of the dancers, clad in the silken robes of fashion; sweet were the strains of valse and mazurka to the ears of youth and beauty, triumphant in the pride of their opening bloom; merry was the laugh at the drollery of clown and pantaloons; and bright were the young eyes sparkling with admiration at the tinsel brilliancy of scenic princess and fairy. Countless were the windows where snow, frost, and wind knocked in vain; countless were the happy groups who heard the wind roar outside with a certain quiet grateful satisfaction, the severity of the weather enhancing their appreciation of the luxuries and comforts with which they were surrounded. And countless, alas! were the numbed, shivering wretches, the sport of winter's icy breath; countless were the groans of despair, and the weary sobs, as poverty and sin did their deadly work, and the outcasts of society, the scum of civilization, the population of court, alley, cellar, and garret, half frozen and ravenous, grovelled in the slavery of a wretchedness that must be endured to be understood.

'Let us go,' said Bridget at length; 'my very breath is freezing on my lips. We'll get nothing to-night, Charlie; and we may as well die at home as in the streets. Cry away, Susie love, and let mammy know you're living. Is that Paul of yours dead, Charlie? He is very quiet; you had better look.'

Charlie's teeth were rattling so that he could hardly answer; but these words of Bridget's almost made his heart stand still. With trembling fingers he drew the red shawl from the little face, and pressed his cold lips to the child's cheek. A weary wail was the response. It stilled Charlie's terrible fear.

'He is all right,' he replied, bundling the little one up again; 'but he's dreadful cold. Let us get home quick, Bridget. I shan't be able to get on much longer.'

So they turned their footsteps towards O'Brian's Court,



hurrying along as quickly as their numbed limbs would permit. The court was quite deserted when they arrived. Bridget opened the door with her key; all was dark. They crept in, feeling their way—Bridget to her chair by the empty grate, Charlie to the old sofa.

'Haven't you a bit of candle, Bridget?'

'No, love—not an inch!'

'Isn't there the least bit of wood that we can make a blaze of? I can't feel that I've any feet and hands; and my ears are aching *so* bad!'

'We've burnt up the mantelpiece, and the skirting-board, and the stool,' replied Bridget, in a hard, dry voice. 'The best part of the floor has gone too; if we burn any more of that we'll have the agent seeing it when he comes for the rent the day after to-morrow, and he'll be turning us out into the streets. The back of that old sofa is wood, and the legs too. I tried to wrench them off this morning, but I couldn't. And if we got them, what good would they be? We've neither a match nor a bit of paper to set them alight. Don't fret, Charlie; what is the good? If we're to be freeze'd, we must freeze.'

Charlie made no reply. He held Paul closer to him, and bent down until his cheek rested against the little one's head.

So half an hour passed; then Bridget spoke.

'Are you asleep, Charlie?'

'No,' he replied, 'I'm too cold to sleep. It's awful here, Bridget. I believe it's worse than in the streets.'

'We were moving about when we were outside,' replied Bridget, 'that kept us from *quite* turning into ice. Put Paul down and jump about a bit, lad. That will warm you.'

'No,' he said wearily, 'if I put him down, I shan't be able to take him up again.'

Another ten minutes rolled by. It seemed like ten hours to the two, sitting shivering in the dark.

'Ay,' cried Charlie suddenly, 'did you speak, Bridget?'

'No, love, I only groaned.'

'Are you *very* bad?'

'I think I'm quite froze, love.'

'Do people ever die of being froze, Bridget?'

'You and me won't, lad; there is no such luck.'

Charlie did not understand, but he was too drowsy and

confused to trouble about an explanation. In some five minutes Bridget spoke again.

'This is awful,' she said with a groan. 'I think we *will* die after all, Charlie; anyhow, the young uns will. They'll never live the night out. Susie honey, are you dead? Is your Paul dead yet, Charlie?'

Charlie had been just about falling into a sleep from which he might never have awoken, when these words aroused his failing faculties and dormant energy. With his own icy fingers he felt the child's little limbs, and then bursting into an agony of grief, he sobbed out:

'Oh, Bridget, Bridget! he is going to die! He's colder than me, ever so much! He will die, I know he will! Oh, dear, dear! I wish that William hadn't been drowned! I wish he could come back! He was kind—Nelly always said he was very kind—and he would never have let us be freezed like this! He would have been fond of Paul, 'cause Nelly is his mammy. He would have got us plenty of fire and food; I know he would. He'd never have left us to die of cold and hunger.'

'No,' replied Bridget, bursting also into tears, 'Nelly's William was a *man*! He wouldn't have sat,—drink, drink, drink, while his wife and baby were slowly dying in the dark and the cold. Oh, to think that it is my Tom that's doing it! Tom, with his bright smile and winning ways, that found words too tame to tell me how he loved me in the old days, when I'd have sworn there wasn't his equal in the whole wide world. Oh, it must have been the devil that made the drink! I'll never believe it was the good Lord! I wish it was all at the bottom of the sea, I do! Ay, cry on, Charlie lad! Let the children cry! Let us all cry! Our tears are the only warm things we've got. We might drink them, and thaw our throats, only they freeze before they get to our mouths.'

'If Tom would only give us a sixpence,' sobbed Charlie in another ten minutes. 'He will drink ten times that before he comes home, or get it stolen from him, as he so often does. Don't you think he would give you sixpence, if you went and asked him? It would buy us some fire. I can't bear it any longer, Bridget. I'm freezed all over. We shall all be dead by morning.'

Bridget arose from her chair, determined and desperate.

'Roll Paul up,' she cried, 'tight, in all the things you've got, and come along. I'll go and ask Tom. He'll be mad with anger at me for going after him; but I may as well be killed asking for sixpence as die for want of it. Come on, Charlie.'

So they once more crept into the night air. All the snow had come down now. It was lying over the whole city. The sky was dark and clear, and the pale moon was looking calmly down, lending the brightness of the crystal to clustering snow-flake, and the lustre of the diamond to pendent icicle and frozen mist. As she threw her silver rays gently and lovingly upon the forms of our first parents roaming through the groves of Paradise, as she smiled upon the infancy of Methuselah, Abraham, Moses, as she lighted the path of prophet, apostle, martyr, Saviour, Redeemer, King, so she now threw her rays, and smiled upon, and lighted the path of Bridget and Charlie, as shivering and sobbing they hurried through the crisp fleecy snow in the direction of the White Swan. A brilliant appearance it presented when they reached it. Coloured lamps, red, green, blue, were throwing long tinted shadows in all directions; gas-jets innumerable were flaming away, seeming to cry aloud that *here* was a sweet refuge from winter's trials, that *here* was the very centre of warmth and brightness. And of gaiety also; for as Bridget and Charlie paused, and peered with longing eyes at the illuminated windows, the strains of a piano were borne to their ears, and immediately after the rough voices of men joining heartily in the chorus of a popular song. Then this ceased, and there was the sound of anger, of noisy disputes, of coarse bickerings and hard names; of the smashing of glass, and of fierce, impious ejaculations; then the song again.

'Don't go amongst them, Bridget,' whispered Charlie. 'They have none of them got their right senses, and they are not safe. They'll do you some hurt.'

'And where will we go then?' she asked bitterly; 'back to that cold dark room?'

She was pausing on the threshold as she spoke, for the sounds of strife and passion were loud again, and even *her* heart, desperate as want and pain had made it, quailed at the thought of penetrating into the midst of that lawless,

reckless crew. It was little Susie who determined her. She broke out once more into a feeble, weary wail that no mother's heart could have resisted. Bridget placed her hand on the door.

'You wait here for me, Charlie,' she said. 'I'll go in. I believe my Susie is dying. When her daddy sees her little white face, he'll maybe have sense enough to give her a drink out of his glass; that will warm her back to life, if he does nothing else for her. He loves her right enough when he's himself.'

But she had hardly taken a step into the gay, warm building, when nearer and nearer came the shouts of mad anger. Charlie caught hold of her dress.

'Come away!' he shrieked; 'they are fighting! they are coming out!'

Quick as thought they both darted across the road, and crouching in a dark doorway, waited with dilated eyes and beating hearts for what would follow. Ah! what *did* follow? A crowd of infuriated men, their reason blinded with the fumes of the soul-destroying fiery liquid, struggling in the street. Then the sound of Tom's voice, muffled and confused with drunken rage; then the whistle and the flying wheels of a fire-engine coming along at almost incredible speed. But it was only Bridget's ear that caught the sound.

'Tom!' she screamed, 'Tom! oh, dear Tom! come away! don't get run over!'

But Tom's brain was insensible to danger that night. The warning voice fell unheeded on his ears. He and several of his companions were stretched on the ground as the engine drew near, their forms hidden in the darkness of the night. The flying horses were almost upon them, when, with a last shriek of despair, Bridget rushed forward to protect her unhappy husband. Then it all happened in the twinkling of an eye. She was knocked down by the foremost horse. She fell upon Tom, several others seemed to fall upon the top of her. The engine stopped, then tore on again, for its business was urgent. All was confusion. People seemed to flock from all sides, and shut in the wriggling, roaring heap that lay in the road; and Charlie's heart stood still with fear as he thought of Bridget and Susie underneath, and noticed that there was no second shriek. He pressed Paul closer to

him and crouched lower in the doorway, for he dare not take his baby into the midst of that uproar. Then the policeman's whistle was heard, and there was a great hurrying to and fro, and a perfect babel of voices. The moments that passed seemed like an age to him waiting there, dreading he knew not what. Then the crowd moved on, and soon after he learned that Bridget, and Susie, and Tom were all three hurt, and that they were being taken to the hospital. Then he was left all alone! Where was he to go? That was what he began to wonder ten minutes later, when a feeble cry from little Paul reminded him that he must go somewhere. But where? back to that dreadful room, to sit alone in the darkness, and think, and freeze, and die? He shuddered at the thought. Tom was gone, Bridget was gone, Susie was gone! How terribly alone he felt! He had only Paul left. He bent down and kissed the tiny face. Another wail broke from the child's lips. He *must* go somewhere, or he would lose him also. Heaven help him, where should he go? He stood in the middle of the street, the snow far above his naked ankles, and he looked first on one side and then on the other. All was dark, all was dreary, all was hopeless. But the moon at that moment broke from behind a black cloud, and shone bright and beautiful upon him, and kind Heaven at the same moment sent a bright thought to his brain, and drove away the darkness of his despair. Mrs. Vogan! He was already running as fast as his numbed, frost-bitten feet would permit him, in the direction of her little cellar. Old, kind-hearted Mrs. Vogan! She might give him shelter for the night. She would at all events take Paul for him, and keep him alive until the morning. He had never been to see her since the time he had helped her to hobble home, because he had never had the twopence to take back to her as he had promised, and he had not liked to go without it. He had not forgotten that she had told him she was very poor. But to-night was no time to think of that. It was no time to think of anything except that he was in dire want, and had only this old Mrs. Vogan to turn to for assistance.

So he ran on. He stumbled here, and he fell there, and he cut his feet on sharp stones, and he jostled and shook poor little Paul in his haste; and when the child set up a

continuous cry, he began to cry too. And so running, and stumbling, and crying, about eleven o'clock he arrived at Mrs. Vogan's cellar-door. She had been in bed for quite two hours. 'Early to bed' was her motto in winter; not that she might grow 'wealthy and wise,' but that she might save her fire and light.

She was now sound asleep, and when Charlie knocked at the door she began to dream. She dreamed, strange to say, that some one was knocking at her door, and that she cried out, in her kindest tones, 'Come in,' and immediately the door burst open, and a great man, with a black face and two flaring eyes, rushed at her and caught her by the throat. She struggled, and choked, and fought hard to get out a loud scream; and at last she awoke to find her heart beating violently, the perspiration standing on her forehead, and to hear that some one *was* knocking at her door in real earnest.

At first she quite thought that it was the black man with flaring eyes; and she crept under the bedclothes and shivered with fear. Then, as her senses returned, she sat up, wondering greatly who it could be, for the knocking continued more loudly than ever. Her dream had so frightened her that it was a long time before she could summon sufficient courage to creep out of bed and cross the room. And all this time Charlie was knocking and crying in the snow. Mrs. Vogan lighted her candle, and put her ear to the key-hole. She started on hearing a loud sob. *That* certainly could not come from a ferocious black man! So, feeling brave once more, she muttered:

'Bah! 'twas only a dream!' and called out: 'Who is there?'

She recognised in the trembling, sobbing voice that answered, 'It's only me,' the voice of a child—a child in distress—a child exposed to all the severity of this terrible night! And, with eager fingers and a heart beating with tenderness, she unlocked the door. Charlie was crying bitterly.

'I thought you'd left,' he sobbed, as he limped in. 'I've been knocking such a time, and I thought you'd left. I've nowhere to go, and I'm all froze with the cold, so I came to you. *Don't* send me away!'

Mrs. Vogan shut and locked her door, to keep out both the dreaded black man and the keen, biting blast. Then she turned to Charlie, and peering into his face, asked wonderingly :

'Who are you, love? What made you come to me? Do I know you?'

'Yes,' he replied ; 'of course you know me. I'm the lad that brought you home the time the asthma had taken you so bad in the street. But I haven't got your twopence. I've tried, but I never could get it !'

'Bless me, if it isn't little Charlie!' cried Mrs. Vogan. 'Kind little Charlie! I've been wondering why he never came to see me, and thought he'd quite forgotten me.'

'No,' sobbed Charlie, 'I hadn't forgotten you ; but I was waiting till I'd got that twopence. I haven't got it now ; but I *had* to come, for Bridget has gone. She's hurt very bad—p'raps she's dead—I don't know ; but I'd nowhere to go, so I had to come here.'

'And quite right too, love!' cried the good-natured old woman ; 'only you should have come before, and not left it so late. Don't cry, dear heart! Here, sit down ; and put your bundle down. What have you got in it?'

'It is Paul,' replied Charlie ; 'Nelly's baby. Her that was drowned in the river, you know. He is dreadful cold and hungry. P'raps he's dead, too ; I don't know! I've done all I could to keep him alive.'

But at the word *baby*, Mrs. Vogan had snatched the bundle from him ; and then, with many a loud exclamation of pity and amazement, she unrolled poor little Paul. She rained down kisses on his white, pinched little face, and she chafed his numbed limbs. And then it suddenly dawned upon her that both children were dying with cold and hunger, and she bundled them together into her warm bed, and got coal and wood and lighted the fire, and boiled the half-pennyworth of milk that was to have served for her breakfast to-morrow, and held the cup to Paul's lips before Charlie had had time to check his sobs.

'He'll be all right when he gets this down, love,' she said, as she seated herself before the fire with the child on her knee ; 'but we were only just in time. Don't cry any more, Charlie. Come and warm yourself ; and get that piece of

bread from the shelf and eat it. I wish I'd a pint of hot milk for you, but this is every drop I've got, and it's no more than the babe ought to take.'

'Oh, let him have it all!' cried Charlie, bending anxiously over the little fellow. 'Are you sure he is quite alive and all right? When he stopped crying awhile back, I thought he was dead.'

'Not he, dear!' replied Mrs. Vogan. 'Look how he is drinking his milk! Poor little darling! he wanted it badly. See, I'll hold him a bit nearer the fire. And you get the bread and eat it; you look famished!'

So he was; that could be seen from the way he clutched the piece of dry bread in his hands, and the eagerness with which he devoured it. Then he sat on the fender, spreading his fingers to catch the glow from the fire, and watching Mrs. Vogan caressing and rubbing little Paul.

'He is right now,' he said, presently. 'He'll fall asleep soon, and awake splendid! You're *very* good; but I'll make it up to you some day, see if I don't.'

Mrs. Vogan glanced at him, and marked his heavy eyes and drooping head.

'You go and get into that bed, Charlie,' she said, 'and go right off to sleep. Me and Paul will be all right together. There, don't say a word. You can hardly keep your eyes open. Get into the bed, as I tell you; and we'll have the talking to-morrow.'

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## CHAPTER VII.

'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'—PSALM xxvii. 10.

FROM the night on which the last chapter closed, Charlie and baby Paul had lived happily with Mrs. Vogan. The kind old woman heard their simple history, and the last thought in her heart would have been to turn them from her warm fire to face once more the cold of the streets. So day after day they remained with her, until at last it came to be an understood thing that the cosy little cellar was to be their home.

In a few weeks from the terrible night when they had so narrowly escaped being frozen to death in Bridget's squalid



room, so great a change had taken place in the appearance of both children that they would have hardly been recognised for the same. Paul, although still pale and far from plump, was coming on nicely. He never knew now what it was to sob with cold and hunger. His bread and milk was always ready when he wanted it, and there was a bright fire always burning in the little grate to keep him warm ; and his clothes were nicely mended and washed, and altogether he looked thoroughly happy and well cared for. The same could be said of Charlie. He was again putting into practice all the habits of cleanliness and neatness that he had learned during the time he had been under poor Nelly's guidance, and that had been interrupted only by the sad change of circumstances following her death. Her careful training had not been given in vain. She was dead, and—so far as this world was concerned—done with ; but not the influence of her gentle, upright nature upon the heart of the neglected boy whose mind she had found steeped in almost the lowest depth of ignorance and sin. That would never ' die,' or ' be done with.' A desire for something nobler than the degradation of the life he had been born in, had been awakened gradually but surely in Charlie's breast ; and now that Nelly was gone, he was only too thankful to have the opportunity Mrs. Vogan's kindness gave him, of turning his back upon the debasement of O'Brian's Court for ever. Only once had he revisited it since taking up his abode in the little cellar, and that was to get his broom that he might continue his occupation of snow-sweeping. On that occasion he had learned from one of the neighbours that Tom, Bridget, and little Susie had all been in the hospital since the accident at the door of the White Swan ; but what was the extent of their injuries nobody appeared to know, although many different reports were going about. Charlie found that their little room had been invaded, and robbed of every stick and rag of furniture it had contained ; but as, under similar circumstances, this was a constant occurrence in such localities, it did not surprise him. His broom he recognised in the hands of an urchin about his own age playing in a street near ; and he had to assert his right of possession in a stand-up fight.

This done, he ran as fast as he could from the spot.

Mrs. Vogan's cellar lay quite at the other side of the city.

Charlie made up his mind that his eyes should never again look upon the wretchedness of O'Brian's Court. Now that he was not obliged to carry Paul about with him while he looked for work, to use his own expression, his 'old luck all came back.'

Mrs. Vogan was often astonished at the heap of halfpennies and pennies he brought home in his pocket; and remembering what he had told her of his early life, she sometimes felt a little uneasy. One night when the sum actually amounted to half-a-crown, her kind old face grew very grave.

'Charlie,' she said solemnly, 'it would be an awful thing if you brought me one farthing that you hadn't a honest right to. I'd rather you came home with nothing at all, love, than you should think of that. Oh dear! I would indeed.'

Charlie looked quite distressed.

'When a chap tells you,' he said in an injured tone, 'that he wants to be 'spectable and honest, and when you know that he has a Paul that he is bound to bring up 'spectable and honest, you ought to believe a chap, you ought.'

'Well, so I do, dear,' replied Mrs. Vogan, a little reassured; 'but that looks such a lot of coppers for a little fellow like you to make in a day.'

'I can't help that,' cried Charlie; 'look at the heaps and heaps of snow there is about! There never was such a year for snow; and haven't I been sweeping it away as hard as I could since early morning? Why, one lady gave me a whole ninepence for brushing a path across her yard, from the kitchen-door to the coal-house; so that the cook wouldn't wet her feet when she went to get the coals. It was a very long job, and the lady gave me ninepence and a bowl of soup into the bargain.'

'Well, well, dear,' said Mrs. Vogan, 'it is all right. You are a brave, hard-working little fellow. I meant no harm. I am an old woman, Charlie. I've seen a lot in my day; and I know well how easy it is for a lad like you to be tempted—that's all! I only meant to warn you a bit, love; just as I used to warn my own poor boy—and you know you've no mammy to——'

But Charlie interrupted her.

'What!' he cried; 'your *own* poor boy! Had you once a lad of your own, then?'

'Ay! I had so, love,' replied Mrs. Vogan, wiping some starting tears from her eyes.

'And where is he now?' he asked.

'Dead, love; dead years and years ago! About your age, he was, when the good Lord called him home; but near twice your size. Ah! he was a fine little fellow! a splendid lad! was my Richard. If it had pleased the good Lord to spare him to me, it isn't in this old cellar I'd be living to-day. But I mustn't grumble. What with the half-crown the parish allows me, and the bit I make with my sewing and knitting, I'm not afraid of being short of a crust.'

'Specially now you've got me to help you,' said Charlie. 'I'll pretend I'm your Richard, and help you as he would have done. I will see that you never want. And I *can*. I'm making a good deal, you know; and I'll make more by-and-by, when I am a big, strong lad. I am going to learn a trade. Nelly always said I was to learn a trade as soon as I was old enough; and I mean to. A trade is the thing to make sovereigns with, isn't it? You will see what a heap of sovereigns I'll make for Paul and you.'

Mrs. Vogan smiled. 'You be a good lad,' she said, 'and you will want for nothing, nor Paul either. The Lord always takes care of good folks.'

'That is what Nelly used to say,' replied Charlie. 'I mean to try, 'cause I've that Paul to bring up. I can't bring him up "'spectable and honest," as he is to be brought up, on nothing; so I must learn a trade, a *good* trade.'

Mrs. Vogan was inclined to smile then at what she considered Charlie's ambitious desire; but as weeks and months passed there seemed to be more and more probability of this desire being gratified, and she smiled no longer. He was so persevering and steady, and he looked so thoroughly respectable in the neat though coarse clothes she had contrived to buy for him out of their savings, that there appeared no reason whatever why he should not be able to carry out his cherished day-dream and learn a trade. The only puzzling part of the business was, who would teach him one? and this question he settled for himself.

After a fortnight's hard search, he came home one night brimful of joy, to tell a wonderful story of how some kind-hearted painter and plumber, overcome with the earnestness

of his solicitations, had agreed to let him come and work in his yard at a weekly payment of four shillings.

'I'm to be there at six o'clock to-morrow morning!' he cried gleefully, 'and I'm just to do whatever I'm told—carry messages, and paint-pots, and sweep up the yard, and everything. But the master says I'll be learning the trade all the time, if I keep my eyes open and look well about me. And he is coming here to-night to see where I live, and to speak to you about it. Now, *isn't* that grand!'

Mrs. Vogan shared his delight most heartily.

'Indeed it is!' she replied. 'I knew you'd get something good in the end; you were trying so hard for it. But this is more than ever I hoped for. A painter and plumber! Why, it is a first-rate trade, Charlie! You will learn to paint houses, and fix pipes, and all kinds of clever things, that pay splendidly. You be a good lad, now; serve your master well, and you're made for life.'

And Charlie *did* serve his master well. Active, intelligent, and willing, before many months were over he became so useful in the work-yard that his absence would have been a serious loss. By the next Christmas he was able to paper and paint Mrs. Vogan's little cellar, and wonderfully gay he made it look. Snow-sweeping seemed to be as far from him now as the North Pole. As he hurried about his work, he often passed ragged, barefooted boys busy with their brushes, or crying matches in the streets; and he would wonder if it were possible that he had ever been like them. He went every week with Mrs. Vogan to the parish-office to get her half-crown, and he brought her his four shillings regularly every Saturday night; and very well off they thought themselves. So the time rolled on. His wages were raised every six months; and under Mrs. Vogan's good management they were living very comfortably. He was growing day by day taller and stronger; and little Paul was getting quite a big boy. Charlie still repeated every night and morning the simple prayer that he had learned from poor Nelly. As soon as Paul could prattle he was also taught to say it: 'Please, Lord, make Paul honest and 'spectable.' But this was the end of their religious observances.

Mrs. Vogan knew nothing of the Lord, except that He was *good*; and this she constantly affirmed. As for the Bible,

there was one on the shelf belonging to the often-talked-of 'Richard;' but Mrs. Vogan could not read it, neither could Charlie. So it remained in its place, an unopened book, except when it was taken down to be dusted, and the fly-leaf that recorded, in bold handwriting, how the volume had been presented to one 'Richard Vogan, as a prize for regular attendance at St. N——'s Sunday School,' duly and wonderingly inspected. They heard the church bells ring every Sunday; but the idea that they were calling *them* to come and join in the worship of the living God never occurred to them. And there was no one to bring this before them, for somehow none of the Master's labourers chanced to come in the way of the little cellar. So they remained doing their duty according to the light that had been given them; and thus the years went on.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

'I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep.'—JOHN x. 14.

THREE feet nothing in height, well-rounded, sturdy limbs, a little head covered with black curly hair, a small-featured, quiet-looking face, and two big dark-brown eyes. Such was Paul at six years of age. They were wonderful eyes, those of Paul's—now sparkling with enjoyment as he raced hither and thither in the fresh spring breeze, now wide opened and wondering as he would sit for half an hour together pondering over some mystery or other that had attracted the attention of his young brains, or indulging in dreamy flights of imagination; and now dim and blurred when his sensitive nature would be rudely hurt, or the ready sympathy of his truly tender little heart aroused. Clear and open was Paul's gaze. Truth, pure simple truth, was plainly written upon every feature of his little face. He was one of those children—of whom, thank God, there are many—who are truthful, not from merit, but from instinct; one of those dear little ones who would have to be taught what subterfuge and deceit were; and alas! the thousand trivial incidents of early life soon teach the sad lesson.

But Paul had not learned it yet. He had not even

learned that he was not to say all he thought. It had not yet dawned upon him that everything he was told was not strictly true. When it did, those trusting, candid eyes of his would be marred by many a glance of doubt and suspicion, and then he would perhaps soon learn the companion lesson that he also might now and then employ evasion and even falsehood to his advantage, and his worldly education would have commenced. But all this was yet to come. At present Paul was very sweet and lovable. Indulged to excess by old Mrs. Vogan and Charlie, it was only his great natural sweetness of disposition that saved him from being utterly spoiled. Every baby whim was gratified, and his comfort and happiness were made the first consideration ; but as yet the only consequence of this excess of attention and affection was to develop a certain confidence and fearlessness in his character that soon became one of his principal traits. He did not seem to understand that anything or anyone could hurt him. When a baby, crawling in the sunbeams on the pavement just above the little cellar, he had to be closely watched, or he would have thrown his arms round the neck of the first stray dog that came within his reach, no matter what its size ; and as soon as he could toddle, he would put his tiny hand contentedly into that of anyone who asked him, and go with them where they would, taking for granted that all was quite right if they were only bigger than himself. Very early he evinced certain roving propensities that were never more apparent in any little thoroughbred Bohemian. At two years of age, Mrs. Vogan dare never let her eye travel very far from him while the cellar-door was open, or he would have crawled to the top of the steps and been across the road before she knew that he had left her side. And by the time he was four, he was in the habit of straying along the city thoroughfares, finding ample amusement in what was passing around, gazing wonderingly into the shop windows, sitting down on some step when he was tired, and only remembering to turn his face homewards when he began to feel hungry.

Many a time had Mrs. Vogan's heart been heavy with anxiety at the prolonged absence of her nursling ; but he always came home safe and sound. Clad in his little, worn, humble garments, often on warm days barefooted, always

bareheaded, he passed unnoticed and unmolested on his way ; and in course of time it became an understood thing that he should stroll about as he pleased, and that he would manage somehow to turn up when he was wanted, which he invariably did. It was fortunate for Paul that things were so, for he was never easy but when in the open air, and if he had not been able to go about by himself, he would but seldom have left the little cellar.

The years that had rounded and lengthened his limbs, made him strong, and filled him with gushing, panting life, had not passed by Mrs. Vogan and Charlie without leaving their marks upon them also. To Charlie they had been kind. They had made him tall and broad-shouldered. They had darkened his fair hair and covered his lip and chin with the down of early manhood. They had made him a clever, able workman, and they had made his hours valuable, far too valuable to be spent in roaming about with little Paul, except upon holidays and Sundays. As for Mrs. Vogan, alas ! they had made her eyes dim and her step feeble ; they had blanched her hair yet whiter, and they had made her attacks of asthma more harassing and more frequent ; for such is the fashion of our poor world. She now liked best to sit in her armchair by the fire in winter, and at the open door in the summer ; and when she went out, she was glad of Charlie's strong arm to lean upon. *She* could not have strolled about with Paul, even had she been so disposed, and so the little fellow was left to go and come all alone, and as he pleased.

One bright morning in early summer Mrs. Vogan was sitting knitting on the top of the flight of steps that led to her cellar-door, and Paul was lying on his back on the pavement, close by her side. His little hands were under his head, and he had been lying so for some five minutes, gazing silently and wonderingly into the great blue vault above him. He had always thought that the sky was a long way off from the earth he walked and played upon, but never had he considered the immensity of the distance until to-day, when from his recumbent position it suddenly dawned upon him. Nothing intercepted his view. Up went the glance of his bright young eyes into the miles and miles of space lying between him and the cloudless heavens. It overwhelmed his young brain. He had just realized what a tiny, tiny

speck he was, and how stupendously great was the arch of blue under which he lived. He sighed with the force of his feelings, and said, in a voice subdued with awe :

‘Granny, isn’t it a long, long way off?—oh, *such* a way, granny?’

‘*What* is a long way off, dearie?’ she asked, letting her needles lie idly in her lap, and gazing fondly upon him.

He drew one of his hands from under his head, and pointing upwards, said :

‘Up there, where all the blue is. It’s so far—oh, *so* far ! What is it up there, granny?’

She followed with her dim eyes the direction of his small finger, and then going on with her knitting, replied :

‘Up there, Paul, is where the good Lord lives.’

‘Oh,’ cried Paul ; ‘is that the good Lord I say my prayer to every night?’

‘Yes, dearie.’

‘And does *He* live up there?’

‘Yes, love.’

Paul had got something to wonder about now. It occupied him for quite three minutes ; then he spoke again :

‘Where is His front-door, granny?’ he asked.

‘Whose front-door, love?’

‘Why, the good Lord’s. You said He lived up there.’

‘Oh yes, of course,’ she replied ; ‘and so He does. The good Lord lives up there, Paul, as everyone will tell you ; but I never heard that He had any front-door.’

‘Then how does He get out?’ asked Paul.

‘I don’t know, love.’

‘He *does* get out sometimes, doesn’t He, granny?’

‘Oh yes, love !’

‘I thought so,’ said Paul gravely ; ‘’cause if He didn’t get out, He couldn’t hear my prayer, you know. You said He *did* hear it, didn’t you, granny?’

‘Oh yes, dearie ! He hears it, *every* word.’

‘Ah !’ observed Paul ; ‘then He must come right down into our cellar ; ’cause I never say my prayer very loud. I’d have to shout, and shout, and shout, to make Him hear all that way off. Yes ; He must come down. Now I wonder how He gets out !’

Mrs. Vogan could give him no information upon this



point, so he lay for some moments conning it over in his mind, evidently perplexed. Presently he brightened and said:

'I guess He's got a front-door somewhere, where we can't see.'

'Very likely, love,' she replied.

'Yes,' he continued, in a tone of satisfaction, 'that will be it. A lovely front-door where we can't see, and where He can get out whenever He likes. But I say, granny, who *is* the good Lord?'

'Who *is* the good Lord, Paul?'

'Yes, granny; who *is* He?'

Again the busy fingers paused in the knitting, as Mrs. Vogan, sorely embarrassed, searched for an answer to the child's question.

'You *know* who the good Lord is, Paul,' she said at length. 'It was Him made the world and everything—*you*, and——'

'Did He really make *me*? ' interrupted Paul, raising himself from the ground in his eagerness, and looking earnestly into her face.

Mrs. Vogan went on with her work. Paul's questions were often too much for her. She felt she had answered him very well this time.

'Yes,' she continued brightly. 'He made you, dearie—did the good Lord; certainly he did.'

'And did He make Charlie too?'

'Oh yes, love, of course.'

Paul was silent for a moment or two. Many a line of thought wrinkled his little brow just then. By-and-by he observed:

'I wish He'd made me as big as Charlie, don't you, granny?'

'You *will* be as big as Charlie some day, Paul. The good Lord always makes people little at first. Since He made you, you've grown from a bit of a babe into quite a big boy; and you'll go on growing till you are as big as Charlie—p'r'aps bigger.'

'I'm very glad of that,' said Paul, rubbing his tiny hands together, by way of expressing his satisfaction; 'that is a very good thing. I shall be glad to be like Charlie. I

think the good Lord made him very well—very well indeed.'

'Not better than He made you, dearie.'

Paul had to consider a moment or two about this, then he replied :

'He's made me very well, too ; I can run and jump, can't I, granny ?'

'Ay, dearie, you can. It isn't all little boys who are made like you, Paul. Very often the good Lord makes them all wrong. Sometimes their legs are no good to them. Sometimes they've no eyes, sometimes no ears, and sometimes no tongues.'

Paul's face expressed the greatest horror for a moment or two. Then a look of pity stole over his features, and tears dimmed his dark eyes as he cried :

'Oh, granny! that is dreadful. Poor little boys! What does the good Lord make them that way for? He shouldn't!'

'You mustn't speak of the good Lord like that, Paul,' replied Mrs. Vogan gravely; 'it is *very* wrong. The Lord knows how to do everything quite right, and when He doesn't, it is for some good reason. You just be very thankful that you are made so well, and never mind those that are made badly.'

'I've beautiful eyes,' cried Paul, 'and beautiful ears, and a beautiful tongue too ; and my legs are just first-rate. I can do anything with them—run and jump, and kick and all, and my hands couldn't be made better. I've never seen any boys who were made wrong ; have you, granny?'

'They're not as plentiful as buttercups, thank the Lord,' replied Mrs. Vogan, 'but I've seen a few in my time.'

Paul did not know what buttercups were. At another time he would have asked a host of questions about them ; but now all his attention was taken up with the poor little boys who were made wrong. This was a subject that had to be considered in all its lights ; and he sat on the pavement absently playing with his little naked feet, thinking it over. All the little boys that he had ever seen had been like himself. He was wondering where all those were who had no eyes, and ears, and tongues, and legs. He made up his mind that he would keep a sharp look-out for them. He was curious to see how they managed to get about.

Presently his glance fell upon Mrs. Vogan's withered face, and diverted his thoughts into another channel.

'Granny,' he said, 'the good Lord didn't make *you* very well, did He? He didn't *quite* forget your eyes, and your ears, and your legs. But He made them very badly; not near so well as mine and Charlie's.'

'Eh, Paul, dearie!' cried the old woman with a quiet chuckle. 'You mustn't talk like that. If the Lord had made me badly as you say, it wouldn't be my place to be finding fault like; for all that the Lord does is good. But He *didn't*, Paul. He made me beautiful. It is because I'm old, that I'm not like you and Charlie. Eyes, and ears, and legs wear out, you know, dearie; and mine are most done.'

'That is a very bad thing,' replied Paul gravely; 'a *very* bad thing. Will mine wear out too, granny?'

'Yes, love; if you get to be as old as me.'

'But what will I do then, granny?' he asked in consternation.

'Why, dearie, you'll do what I'm doing. You'll wait patient and quiet till the good Lord thinks it time to take you to heaven and give you new ones.'

'New eyes, and ears, and legs, granny?' cried Paul eagerly.

'Yes, love; new ones—beauties! And wings too, Paul; what do you think of that? Beautiful wings, so that you will be able to fly about like the sparrows!'

Paul's eyes sparkled, and he rubbed his little hands vigorously.

'That *will* be nice,' he ejaculated. 'I shall never walk then, granny; I shall always fly. It must be splendid to fly. Granny, I should think you'd be *very* glad when the Lord takes you to heaven and gives you new eyes, and ears, and legs. What you have are next to no use at all. *Will* you be glad when the Lord takes you, granny?'

'Well, I suppose so, dearie,' she said, a little doubtfully.

'I should think you'd be *very* glad,' observed Paul, after a pause of one or two moments. 'I know *I* should.'

'It isn't always the old ones who go first,' said Mrs. Vogan. 'Sometimes the good Lord takes a fancy to the "lamb," and off they go, one after the other, in spite of physic, and doctors, and tears, and all.'

Paul did not know what *lambs* were. They did not run about the City streets like dogs ; but he had caught the word, and asked :

‘What are lambs?’

‘Lambs, dearie?’ repeated Mrs. Vogan.

‘Yes,’ he cried. ‘You said “Sometimes the Lord takes the lambs”—what are they?’

‘Oh, they’re the little ones,’ she explained ; ‘all the dear little children—boys and girls.’

‘Boys and girls,’ said Paul ; ‘does the good Lord ever take boys as little as me?’

‘He does indeed, love,’ replied Mrs. Vogan.

Paul was silent for some time after that ; when he spoke, it was to say :

‘When the good Lord takes me to heaven, I shan’t want any new eyes, nor ears, nor legs. What I’ve got will do very well. But I shall be very glad of the wings. Oh, I shall be *very* glad of the wings!’

Mrs. Vogan glanced hastily at the serious little face, and drawing it close to her, peered anxiously into it. No, there was no cause for alarm. Paul looked the very picture of robust healthy life. She did not, however, like the turn the conversation had taken, and in order to change it she arose, saying :

‘Come and help granny, Paul, to peel the potatoes for Charlie’s dinner.’

He sprang up instantly, and was soon standing by her side: a potato in one hand, and the knife in the other, thoroughly absorbed in his task. But he did not forget what they had been talking about ; for from that day he never went out without scanning all the little boys who passed him, to see if the good Lord had made them all right, or wrong ; and he often gazed into the blue sky and thought of the beautiful wings he should have when he went to live up there ; and he never saw any old or decrepit man or woman without thinking how pleased they would be to get to heaven, and have their new eyes, and ears, and legs. Charlie and Mrs. Vogan often wondered what the child was thinking about, when they would catch sight of his grave little face and dreamy far-away look. Sometimes they would question him, but they never learned anything

satisfactory; for Paul liked best to keep his thoughts to himself.

A few weeks later, when June had brought bright sultry days and long pleasant evenings, the young man who called at the little cellar every Monday morning for the rent, brought some wonderful news. He told them that the whole block of buildings, of which the cellar formed a part, was going to be pulled down, and that they must find a new home by the next week. When Paul properly understood what was meant by 'finding a new home,' he was delighted. He danced about shouting, 'We're going to leave—we're going to leave,' as loud as he could; and then he stopped suddenly, with a look of alarm on his little face, on finding that Mrs. Vogan was sobbing bitterly.

'Granny's crying! Granny's crying!' he exclaimed, with quivering lips and down-drawn mouth, pulling at the apron she was holding to her eyes: and as the old woman's sobs still continued, he burst into a howl of distress.

If his object in so doing was to calm his 'granny,' he acted most wisely; for of course she had to forget her own grief while she took him on her knee and wiped his tears away. Then he heard with great wonder that there was nothing the matter with her, only she was sorry to be obliged to leave the old cellar. Going to live somewhere else seemed to be such a delightful event to him that he could not understand this at all. However, he did his best to console her.

'Don't cry about it, granny,' he said, reassuringly. 'Charlie won't let them send us away, if you don't want to go. He is very strong, is Charlie. He will shut the door and keep them all out; so don't you cry.'

Mrs. Vogan's only answer was a long sigh. She knew too well they would be compelled to go, and very sad she felt about it. She would have liked to sit fretting and brooding over it all day; but this was quite impossible while Paul was about.

'Crying again, granny!' he said every time he caught sight of a glistening tear.

And as he refused to leave her, even to go and peep in the yard where Charlie was at work (his great treat), she was obliged to turn her thoughts altogether from the painful

subject, and to smile and talk cheerfully before he would be satisfied that there was really nothing wrong with her.

But at night, when he was fast asleep in bed, and she and Charlie were talking over their future plans, she broke down again.

'To think,' she sobbed, 'that I should have to leave the old home after being in it nigh forty years. I know it is broken down and done. There isn't a whole flag left in the floor, and scarce an inch of plaster in the ceiling, spite of all your patching. But I love every corner of it, Charlie; and if it had got to be three times as bad, I'd have stuck to it. I didn't know how much I loved it, till I heard I'd got to leave it. I'll never settle in a new place. My poor old heart will break!'

This was certainly a dark side to what otherwise Charlie was inclined to look upon as a very bright picture. He was getting good wages now, and could afford a much pleasanter home than this little cellar—for it was very small; for many years past he had been obliged to rent a small room in a lodging-house near where he slept. He had long thought how much nicer it would be if they moved into a little house; but each time he had hinted this to Mrs. Vogan she had shown so decided an objection to change her dwelling, that he had said no more. Now, however, they would be obliged to go. There was evidently no help for it; so he tried to reconcile her to the idea. He pointed out every chink and crack and hole (and they were many) in the old walls, saying:

'Don't you remember how the wind whistles through there, and the rain comes in there, and the snow drifts in there? No one can say but that there isn't a damper, colder place in the whole city. You know how bad your cough and asthma were all last winter. I blame this cellar for it all, and for your rheumatism too; and I really think it is a very good thing that we are obliged to leave it. So will you, when you see how cosy we will all be together in the nice bit of a house I mean to look up for us; where I won't be obliged to go out to sleep at nights and leave you and Paul alone, as I am here. And it won't be so strange for you either, granny. I'll fix all the things just as we have them here, except the bed, which may be in a snug little room

by itself. Why, you won't know that you've made a change, unless it is through your finding yourself so cosy and warm, and getting rid of your asthma altogether.'

Well might old Mrs. Vogan thank God in her heart that He had led the two shivering starving children to her door. What would her life have been without them? What would her days have been without Paul's merry prattle, without his clinging affection, without his constant 'granny this and granny that,' bringing with it as it did the welcome assurance that 'granny' was wanted, that she was useful and necessary, that now if the Lord called her suddenly to her rest, she would be missed, that bitter tears would fall on her empty chair, and water her lowly grave? And Charlie—big, strong, clever Charlie—what would she have done without him? Why, as she assured him, she 'might have lain down and died!'

'Fancy,' she cried, 'strangers coming to a lone old woman and telling her to move from a place she has lived in forty years! Why, the very thought would have driven me out of my senses! I never could have done it! I would have stayed here till they pulled the place down over me, or till they had come and carried me off to the workhouse, and sold all my bits of things.'

Nothing like that was going to happen now. No, she had only to sit in her chair and wait while Charlie did all for her. He and Paul sallied forth evening after evening to search for the little house they wanted. They were very hard to please; but at last, on the fifth evening, they found it; and on the sixth evening they went into it. When the bustle of moving was over, and the simple furniture settled in its place, even Mrs. Vogan confessed herself well satisfied with the change.

The house was in a quiet little by-street. The rooms were small, but three in number; and all for four shillings a week. Charlie took two or three pounds from his savings, and he and Paul made some wonderful purchases at the brokers' shops, until Mrs. Vogan declared the house was getting too grand for her altogether. When she looked at the bright (if not artistic) pictures upon the walls, at the warm strip of carpet under her feet, at the plants growing on the window-sill, at her new rocking-chair, and at the various other homely comforts that Charlie had surrounded her with,

she declared that she had never been so well off in all her life—no, never !

Charlie smiled as he replied : ‘ Well, I think we’re pretty cosy and respectable now, granny, ain’t we ?—“ Honest and ‘spectable ”—as I promised poor Nelly I would always be.’

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## CHAPTER IX.

‘ Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ?’

JOHN ix. 2.

IN spite of a constant search, Paul had not yet been successful in discovering any little boy whom the good Lord had ‘ made wrong ’—to put into words his own thoughts. It never occurred to him that physical infirmities existed in any other class of humanity beside that one mentioned especially by old Mrs. Vogan ; and therefore men, women, and girls passed him unnoticed, while every boy who came immediately in his way was subjected to the eager examination of his dark eyes, with a view to discover ‘ if the good Lord had made him all right.’ The idea of a merry glad child like himself being born, and obliged to live day after day without eyes or ears, or tongue or legs, was so terrible to Paul, that he never failed to draw a sigh of relief on finding that each boy who came under his scrutiny was as well off in these respects as himself ; and he was quite overjoyed when he at last came to the conclusion that it must be very seldom indeed that the good Lord made poor little boys so terribly deficient as Mrs. Vogan had asserted. Judge then of his dismay when one morning, in the course of his wanderings, he sauntered into a quiet respectable court not far from his new home, and came suddenly upon a tiny girl, who was certainly made all ‘ wrong.’ Yes, there could be no doubt of that, and Paul’s eyes and mouth opened very wide as he stood beside her in silent horror. She was seated on a little chair at the open door of one of the houses. She looked very small, much smaller than Paul. Her little naked legs were no thicker than his arms, and her hands and wrists were thinner than he had ever thought hands and wrists could be. Her little face was pinched and sharp, and oh !



so white. A quantity of fair hair fell below her shoulders, covering, but not hiding, a terribly developed hump, that gave her the appearance of being almost double. She had a pair of big sad blue eyes which were now fixed on Paul in a half-frightened way, and an expression of doubt was upon her sharp features, that quickly changed to one of alarm, as, shrinking back in her little chair, she wailed piteously :

‘Oh, *don't* hurt me, Billy!’

Instantly Paul was on his knees before her, tears ever ready to be called forth by the sight of suffering were already filling his eyes, and even his voice trembled from pity, as, taking her white wasted hand in his, he replied :

‘Poor little girl! why, I wouldn't hurt you for all the world.’

‘Who are you?’ she asked in tones of the greatest astonishment.

‘I'm Paul,’ he replied.

‘Paul,’ she repeated; ‘but who is Paul?’

‘Me,’ cried he; ‘*I'm* Paul.’

‘I never heard talk of Paul,’ she observed, after a moment's consideration; ‘tell me who you are. I know you're a child by your voice; but are you a girl or a boy?’

It was now Paul's turn to pause and consider. His sympathy gave way to a little indignation. He had never been taken for a girl before, and didn't like it. Did he look a bit like a girl, in his corduroy jacket and trousers? She must be laughing at him.

He drew himself up, and replied the least bit stiffly:

‘Don't be silly—of course I'm a boy. Can't you see?’

‘Don't be angry,’ she entreated, the frightened expression returning to her face again. ‘Mammy has gone to work, and there is no one to take care of me. I couldn't tell you were a boy till you told me. I didn't know *Paul* was a boy's name. I never heard it before.’

‘But can't you see?’ cried Paul, a little appeased. ‘Girls wear petticoats, like yours—not trousers, like mine!’

‘I know that,’ she replied; ‘but you didn't tell me how you were dressed; and I am blind.’

‘Blind!’ repeated Paul wonderingly; ‘what's that?’

‘I mean I can't see,’ she explained. ‘I've got no eyes.’

‘No eyes!’ cried Paul, gazing searchingly into the blue

eyes before him ; 'why, you've got beauties ! These are your eyes,' and he touched them gently with his fingers.

'Oh yes,' she explained, 'they are there right enough, I know; but they are of no use'—shaking her head sadly—'of no use at all !'

'Of no use?' said Paul, his heart beginning to beat. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean,' replied the child, 'that I can't see with them as you can with yours.'

'Can't you see *me*?' he cried.

'No; not a bit of you.'

'Can't you see my hands?' he continued excitedly, holding them up before her face.

'No.'

'You *must* see them, now?' he went on, flashing scarlet with his earnestness, and putting them quite close to her wide-opened eyes.

'No, I can't,' she replied quietly.

'Can't you see nothing, nothing, nothing?' he roared.

'No,' was the sad answer; 'not *one* thing !'

Paul was quite overcome; sinking down beside her, he exclaimed, in a voice thick with compassion and indignation:

'It's a great shame! You are made all wrong! The good Lord hasn't made your back right a bit! It is *very* ugly. And He can't have made your eyes right either, or you would be able to see with them.'

'I know I am very ugly,' said the child, with a slight quiver of the lip; 'but it wasn't the good Lord who made me ugly. He made me quite straight and nice. It was a fall made me like this, and spoilt my eyes. I got badly hurt when I was a little baby. I can't remember it; but I have been all crooked and quite blind ever since.'

'But you don't mean to say that the good Lord really made you like other children?' cried Paul.

'I don't know how other children are made,' she replied.

'I can't see, you know! But mammy says I was all right and splendid till the fall spoiled me. It broke me all up like; and the doctors couldn't mend me straight.'

Paul's sympathy would not allow him to speak for some moments. When he again found his voice, he cried:

'I never heard anything so dreadful—to go and let you

fall, and make your back like that, when the good Lord had made it all right! Poor little girl! I'm *so* sorry. And your eyes, too! I'm shutting mine now; I can see nothing but dark. Do you *always* see dark?

'What is *dark*?' asked the child:

'Why, black,' explained Paul; 'dark, horrid black.'

The child shook her head.

'I don't know what "black" means,' she said. 'If you give me some to feel, p'raps I shall know.'

'You can't *feel* black,' said Paul; 'it is a colour—like white, red, blue, and yellow. Don't you know what they are?'

'I hear folks talking about them,' she replied. 'I've often wondered what they are. Try and tell me. What is *yellow*? Mammy bought me a yellow shawl the other day. I know what a shawl is. I can feel it. It is soft and warm; but what is *yellow*?'

'Yellow!' cried Paul, eager to give the desired information—'yellow! Why, yellow is bright, and light, and——'

'But what is "bright," and "light"?' interrupted the child.

'Well, clear—gay-like,' replied Paul, after a moment's hesitation.

'Bright, light, clear, and gay,' she said thoughtfully. 'I've heard of all those often; but I must feel them before I shall know what they are.'

'But you *can't* feel them!' cried Paul.

'I can if you bring them to me,' she said. 'Bring me some "yellow," and let me hold it in my hand, then I shall know what it is quite well.'

'Oh, you poor little girl!' cried Paul in distress. 'I'm so sorry, but I can't bring you any "yellow"—nobody can. You must see it to know what it is.'

'I can't see it,' she said, a little fretfully; 'don't I tell you I've no eyes! But I *have* hands—two! Look'—and she stretched them towards him—'I can *touch* anything. And if you would only bring me some "yellow," I could touch it, and then I'd know what it is.'

'But there isn't anything to touch!' cried Paul.

'There isn't anything to touch?' she repeated. 'Is "yellow" *nothing*, then?'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'it's nothing; at least, it *is* something. It is *something* to see, but *nothing* to touch. It's—it's—it's like the sun,' he cried brightly, as this new idea suggested itself to him. 'The sun is "yellow," always; except at night, when it's very often red.'

'I know what the sun is,' replied the child; 'it is up there—away in the sky—oh, ever so far! I love the sun!' and the little face smiled for the first time during the conversation.

'But you can't see it?' said Paul.

'No,' she replied, 'but I can feel it. I can feel it shining on me, oh, so warm! It is on my head now!'

'I can see it,' observed Paul; 'it is making your hair shine. I like your hair, it is pretty. I think it's a beautiful colour. Mine is black.'

'Black?' repeated the child; 'then it's horrid.'

'No, it isn't,' replied Paul quickly.

'You said "*black*" was horrid just now,' said the child innocently.

'Oh, but I didn't mean black hair,' explained Paul. 'There are a great many things "*black*" that are very nice. The kettle's black, and some dresses are black, and my Sunday clothes are black, and none of those are horrid.'

'This "*black*" and "*yellow*" must be something very queer,' said the child. 'I can't make out one bit what they are.'

'They are not queer,' replied Paul; 'they are very nice—at least "*yellow*" is; and "*red*" is beautiful—so are "*blue*" and "*green*." Oh, and "*pink*!" Why, *pink* is just lovely! But you will never know what they are until you can see. Do you think you will ever be able to see?'

'Yes,' replied the child quietly, 'when the great God takes me to His beautiful heaven, and turns me into an angel, I shall see quite well.'

'Oh yes!' cried Paul, 'I had forgotten heaven. You will have your eyes made all right there. I should think you would be very glad when the great God takes you?'

The child hesitated before she replied:

'I get very tired sometimes when I'm all by myself; and I cry for something, I don't know what: p'raps it is for the time to come quick when I shall fly away to heaven, and

be a beautiful angel—I don't know. But when I am sitting on daddy's knee, and hear mammy moving about, or when my kind lady is talking to me, I feel as if I could stay here for ever, and never want to be an angel.'

'Who is your kind lady?' asked Paul.

'Oh,' cried the child, a happy smile overspreading her little white face, 'I mean Mrs. Dunraven; the dear, beautiful lady who has made us all so happy.'

'Made you all so happy?' repeated Paul. 'How did she do that?'

'I don't know,' was the reply; 'but she did. Mammy says we used to be very poor and miserable once. We had only rags for clothes, and we had nothing to eat, and no fire, and no nice home, or nothing at all. And now, only look in at the door. Isn't our house just as snug as snug can be? I can't see it, but mammy and daddy say it is.'

Paul glanced through the open door into the neat, comfortable little kitchen beyond, and replied:

'Yes, it is; it is just as nice as ours.'

'Well,' said the child, 'mammy says we may thank Mrs. Dunraven for all of it. She is such a dear lady! She is so sorry about my eyes! She has had me at all the doctors in the City to look at them; but no one can cure them—no one. But as soon as I get a bit bigger, she is going to send me to a school where they teach little blind girls like me to do all kinds of wonderful things. Won't that be nice?'

'Yes,' replied Paul, 'it will. I should think you would be very glad to know how to do something. Do you always sit in that little chair doing nothing?'

'Yes,' said the child, with a long sigh; 'and I get so tired! When mammy is at home, she takes me for a little walk every now and then; but when she is out working, I have to sit still.'

'You *can* walk, then?' exclaimed Paul.

'Oh yes, if somebody holds my hand, and keeps me from the lamp-posts and the edge of the pavements.'

'Would you like to take a little walk now?' he asked. 'If you would, you shall. I'll hold your hand, and I won't let you fall over anything.'

For a second the child appeared pleased; then a look of uneasiness settled upon her features, and she replied:

'I would like it very much ; but I'm so afraid of Billy Blake.'

'Who is Billy Blake ?' asked Paul.

The child lowered her voice, as though she were afraid of being overheard.

'He is a bad boy !' she whispered. 'He pulls my hair, and he carries me away from my chair, and laughs when I can't find my way back ! And sometimes he pinches me ! Oh, he is a very bad boy !'

'Why don't you tell your mammy of him ?' cried Paul.

'Because she'd beat him,' replied the child ; 'and then he'd beat me. He said so ; and once he did.'

Paul squared his little fists.

'Can I fight him ?' he asked, with heightened colour and indignant eyes. 'I should like to knock him down. Is he much bigger than me ?'

'I don't know how big you are,' she said. 'Come here and let me see.'

'But you can't *see*,' said Paul.

'I mean *feel*,' she explained. 'If you come close to me and let me put my hands on you, I shall soon know how big you are.'

So Paul got up and stood before her, and she drew her hands slowly from his shoulders to his feet.

'Billy is bigger than you,' she observed, as she concluded her examination. 'I don't know how much ; but I should think a good deal.'

Paul sighed.

'Then I can't knock him down,' he said. 'I'm very sorry. Never mind ; I've got a Charlie at home—a *very* big, strong Charlie ; and if Billy hurts and teases you, I'll tell him. Where is he ?'

'Billy ?' said the child inquiringly.

'Yes, Billy ; where does he live ?'

'At the end of the street,' was the reply. 'But he is at school all the morning and afternoon. He comes home at twelve o'clock. Do you think it is twelve o'clock yet ?'

'No,' replied Paul ; 'I'm sure it is not. Charlie comes home for his dinner at twelve o'clock, and I always feel hungry about then. I'm not a bit hungry now ; so I'm sure it is not twelve yet.'

'Then I can go for a walk,' cried the child gleefully. 'You won't leave me, will you, Paul?'

'I should think not. Why, how will you get home if I leave you?'

'Then you'll bring me back quite to the door?' she asked.

'Of course I will.'

'And you won't let me fall?'

'No.'

'Nor be run over?'

'No.'

'Come along, then,' she said, and she arose from her chair.

Paul took her little hand, and led her carefully down the street. Her deformity showed more when she was walking than when sitting. Her sharp little chin rested on her chest, and her height was so reduced by the terrible roundness of her back, that she barely reached Paul's shoulder. As his glance fell upon her, his young heart swelled with pity. He had never seen anything so ugly, he thought, as this poor little girl. Why, she was almost double—and blind, too!

The sun was shining, people were passing, boys were whistling, sparrows were chirping—but all was alike to her. She could see nothing, poor little girl! He had never been so sorry for anybody before, and the compassion and sympathy aroused in his young breast were too great for his sensitive nature. By-and-by he would get used to sights of sorrow and tales of woe (as who does not who sojourns in this sad world of ours?); but to-day his feelings were all the stronger for being so entirely new, and by the time he had led his little crippled companion to the end of the street, his lip was trembling and his dark eyes were moist.

He was about to try and explain all he was feeling for her sake, when his regret was suddenly changed to intense indignation. There were some children playing on the opposite pavement, and as these caught sight of the two trudging along, they began to hoot and cry after them.

'Halloo, Mother Hubbard!' cried one.

'Bravo, Humpty-Dumpty!' called another.

'What will you take for your back?' screamed a third.

Paul was furious.

'You take tight hold of these railings till I come back,'

he said to the afflicted little girl. 'I am going to knock all those bad children down.'

'Oh, no! no!' she cried, clinging to him in alarm. 'You promised you wouldn't leave me.'

'But I must,' replied Paul, in a voice trembling with rage. 'I must go and beat those children. Don't you hear? They are calling you names.'

'Oh, never mind them,' she said; 'they always do. Come, let us go on.'

But Paul still stood glaring defiance at the noisy group across the road.

'The bad, bad things!' he ejaculated between his teeth. 'You had better let me go to them. You will be quite safe by these railings; and I should *so* like to knock them all down.'

'No, no! please no!' she entreated. 'I shall be frightened, because I can't see, you know. I don't mind them calling me names. I dare say I *do* look funny. Let us go on; *do* let us go on.'

Very reluctantly he complied with this earnest request. He had never been so angry in all his life. He had never wanted to fight before; and he felt really disappointed at having to walk quietly on and leave the little offenders behind him shouting provokingly triumphant. However, the plaintiveness of the appeal, 'I shall be frightened,' kept him by his blind friend's side; and as they strolled along, he soon grew calm again. Most vigilant was the guard he kept over the poor child. Not once did he forget that she had no eyes. 'Take care,' he would say when they came to a crossing; 'put your foot down.' 'Now—up again,' when they reached the other side. 'This way,' when a lamp-post was in their path. 'Now then, who are you pushing?' (indignantly) when a passer-by knocked rudely against her; and after that he put his arm gently round her when anyone passed, and drew her out of their way. He made the walk very pleasant, too, by his constant observations upon what lay around them.

'The sun is so bright to-day,' he said presently; 'can you feel it?'

'Yes,' she replied; 'it is shining on me; and the pavement is quite warm.'



'I wear shoes and stockings when it is cold,' said he, glancing at their little bare feet.

'So do I,' was her reply; 'but when it is warm, mammy says I'm as well without them.'

'That is just what granny says,' observed Paul; 'but when I get bigger—big enough to work, I mean—I shall wear them always.'

'Who is granny?' asked the child.

'Granny?' repeated Paul; 'she's—well, she's my granny. I don't know who else she is. She takes care of me, you know.'

'Takes care of you!' cried the child. 'Where is your mammy, then?'

'I haven't got a mammy,' replied Paul.

'Then where is your daddy?'

'Haven't got a daddy neither,' he answered.

'Oh dear!' said the child in a tone of great concern. 'Where are they?'

'I never had any,' said Paul. 'Don't look so sorry. I don't want them.'

'I would break my heart if I had no daddy and no mammy,' said the child.

'Ah, but that is because you have no granny and no Charlie,' replied Paul. 'What do I want with a daddy and a mammy while I've them? They are a deal better. Halloo! there is a sparrow flying away with such a big piece of bread. I dare say he is going to take it to his nest.'

'I know what sparrows are,' said the child. 'I hear them chirping in the morning. I had a bird of my own once; my beautiful lady's little girl gave it to me.'

'Has the lady who made you all happy a little girl?' asked Paul.

'Yes; a beautiful little girl. Her name is Miss Ethel; and she comes to see me very often with her mamma, our kind, beautiful Mrs. Dunraven.'

'How do you know they are beautiful, if you can't see them?' asked Paul.

'Because I can feel their clothes,' she replied. 'Sometimes they rustle, and sometimes they are smooth and thick—quite different to mine and mammy's. Besides, I know they are beautiful, because mammy says so.'

'And did the little girl give you a bird?' asked Paul by-and-by.

'Yes; Miss Ethel gave me a bird—a canary, she said it was called. It had a lovely cage to live in, and it used to sing, oh, so loud! Mammy used to give it me on my knee when I would be sitting at the door, and it would chirp for me and peck my finger between the bars. I loved my bird!'

'And where is it now?' asked Paul.

'Billy Blake opened the cage-door, and it flew away,' she replied sadly.

'Did he do it on purpose?' inquired Paul, getting angry again.

'He told mammy he didn't; but I believe he did, because he likes to tease me.'

'He shan't tease you while I am near,' said Paul, feeling all ready for Billy Blake. 'I am very strong; p'raps I can knock him down, if he *is* bigger than me. But why didn't Miss Ethel give you another bird?'

'Perhaps she will when she knows the other one is gone,' said the child. 'She has not been to see me since I lost it. She is away with her mamma, in a country a long way off; I forget its name, but mammy knows.'

'Will they never come back?' asked Paul.

'Oh yes,' cried the child; 'I *should* be miserable if I thought I was never going to see my dear Mrs. Dunraven and Miss Ethel again. They will come back some day—very soon, I think.'

Paul was about to make another observation when the words were stayed on his lips by hearing a voice behind him exclaim in astonishment:

'Why, Susie, what brings you here?' and at the same moment a hand was laid upon each child's shoulder.

'It is mammy!' cried Susie. 'Oh, mammy, I have had such a nice walk! This is Paul, and he has been *so* kind! He saw me sitting at the door, and he has been with me ever since.'

'God bless him for a fine little man!' exclaimed the woman heartily. 'And what made you take up with my poor Susie, honey, her that most of the boys love to tease?'

'I like her,' replied Paul, nodding his black head towards

Susie ; 'and she was tired of sitting in the chair, so I took her for a walk.'

'And thank you kindly too, my lad,' she said, patting him on the back. 'Where may you live, sweetheart, and what may be your name?'

'We don't live far from here,' he replied ; 'just down that street yonder ; and my name is 'Paul.'

'*Paul!*' she repeated thoughtfully. 'I've heard that name before. Paul what, love?'

'Paul nothing,' he said ; 'just Paul.'

The woman said the name over once or twice to herself, as though she were taxing her memory in regard to it. Suddenly little Susie cried :

'He has got no mammy and daddy, only a granny and a Charlie ;' and, at the word 'Charlie,' the woman's face lighted up with the brightness of recollection. Putting her hand to the boy's chin, she raised his face and eagerly examined his features.

'Can it be?' she muttered. 'There is a great look of poor Nelly in his eyes ; and Paul is a mighty uncommon name, too ; and then the other one, *Charlie*. Why, it must be.'

'What is it?' here inquired Paul, wondering what this was all about.

But the woman had her apron to her eyes, and instead of replying she broke into a wail, crying :

'Oho ! oho ! My baby was the bonniest of the two, and look at them there as they stand side by side !—him straight as the Lord made him, and her all—all——'

Here her voice became inaudible. Paul could only gaze in silent wonder, while little Susie cried in some concern :

'Why, mammy, what ails you? Don't cry !'

The woman's answer was to raise her poor little girl in her arms and kiss her passionately. Then she stooped to Paul.

'Give me a kiss, honey,' she said ; 'it won't be the first by many a one. Susie and me must run home now, or daddy won't get his dinner. But you'll come and see her again and talk to her, won't you, darling, if it is only for the sake of old times? And hark, Paul ! you tell Charlie that you've met Bridget, and say she wants to see him. Will you think on it?'

'Tell Charlie that Bridget wants to see him,' repeated Paul.

'Yes, honey; that is it. Bridget wants to see him. You can show him where me and Susie live; can't you, love?'

'Oh yes,' replied Paul; 'but will he know who Bridget is?'

'You just try him, sweetheart. Now we must be off. Good-bye, love, and thank you hearty for the care you've taken of my poor lass.'

'You will come again, won't you, Paul?' cried Susie, as her mother carried her off; and he shouted his promise that he would, and then stood leaning against some railings watching them until they were out of sight, when he scampered home as fast as he could.

In consequence of what he heard, Charlie lost no time in eating his simple noonday meal; and then, taking Paul by the hand, he bade the little fellow lead him to the house of the woman who called herself Bridget. The door was again open, for the weather was warm, and Charlie immediately recognised Tom in the man who was nursing the little cripple so fully described by Paul, and Bridget in the woman who was sweeping up the hearth. They welcomed him with great pleasure. Paul and Susie soon slipped away by themselves; and Tom, drawing a chair forward, invited Charlie to sit down.

'My! Charlie, love,' cried Bridget; 'what a great strapping fellow you have grown!'

'It is a long time since you saw me,' replied Charlie; 'near five years now; and of course I haven't been standing still all that time. But what do you think of my Paul—isn't he just splendid?'

Bridget glanced at the doorstep, where the two children were sitting talking together, and turned away with something like a sob. Tom heard it, smothered as it was, and he knew what had called it forth. Pointing to Susie, whose deformity seemed increased tenfold in contrast with Paul's erect, graceful little form, he said with a groan:

'It is hard for a man to have his sin for ever before his eyes, in the shape of a loving, crooked bit of a daughter, isn't it? And no repentance will make her straight, or give her back her pretty eyes. You know how it was done, don't you, Charlie? Bridget told me you were with her that

dreadful night. I'm an altered man now, thanks to the good Lord, who sent the sweetest lady that ever was born to snatch me from ruin ; but I wish, and I'll always wish, that I'd been struck dead twice over before I was left to turn my own child into a sight like that.'

'Come, come now, Tom,' exclaimed Bridget, turning away to wipe a starting tear from her eyes ; 'it is high time you left off blaming yourself for what was nothing more or less than a slip in the snow, as I've told you over and over again. If it was anyone's fault, it was just my own. What did I want running right in the way of a flying fire-engine, like a mad thing, with the precious baby in my arms ? But enough of that ! Eh, Charlie, if I could only tell you all Tom has been to me since it happened ! Why, he's—well, he's just come back again to the dear lad I married years ago, and that's all about it. Thirty shillings he earns every week of his life, for he was always smart, was Tom ; but how much of that thirty shillings do you think the drink gets ? *Not one penny*. And look at us—ain't we cosy ? don't we eat well, and sleep well, and haven't we got a nice little bit laid up in the bank in case of a rainy day ? which of course we should always be on the look-out for, seeing it is the most likely thing that can happen to anyone living in this world.'

'You need not thank me for a bit of it,' cried Tom. 'I'd be just the mad, drinking wretch I was, if it had not been for our dear Mrs. Dunraven, bless her ! I say, Charlie, you've heard of the guardian angels, haven't you, that are always about us to keep us straight for the Lord ? But did you ever hear tell of a man having his guardian angel in the shape of a beautiful lady that he can see and hear, and that won't leave him alone nohow, and that the more determined he is to go headlong to destruction, the more determined she is to pull him back ? That is what Mrs. Dunraven has been to me : just a guardian angel, isn't that it, Bridget ?'

'Indeed it is,' replied Bridget ; 'a guardian angel ; nothing less. I shall never forget the time she came to my bed in the hospital, and found me breaking my heart about Tom there, and got me to tell her all my trouble !'

'Ay,' interrupted Tom, with a quiet smile, 'I shan't forget that either. Why, she came after me ! think of it, Charlie ! a lady, soft and delicate, found her way to O'Brian's Court ;

and she opened the door and saw me sitting there scared-like, wondering if I had killed Bridget and the little one; for, you see, I wasn't hurt so bad as they were, and I came out of the hospital long before them; and for some days I couldn't get to know for certain if it was dead or alive they were, at all at all. You may think how taken aback I was when one afternoon, while I was fretting over it all, a lady opened the door quite sudden-like, as I told you. Said she: "Are you Tom Mulligan?" "Sure I am, ma'am," says I. "Then," says she, "you must follow me. Your wife, Bridget, wants to see you at once." So I got up and followed her, all in a daze-like. Well, she took me right to Bridget's bedside, and she left me there an hour or more. I can tell you, Charlie, I shed more tears in that hour than in all my life put together. Poor Bridget had her leg broke, and badly too. And as to Susie, you can see for yourself the way *she* was in; and you'll know I'd something to cry about, for I loved them both, though no one would have thought it. I was just getting a bit calm again, when up comes the lady, with a bright bunch of posies for Bridget. "Tom," says she, as easy as if she'd known me all my life, "don't you think Bridget looks very clean and comfortable?" "She does, ma'am," says I, for indeed she did. What with the clean sheets and pillow, and her clean face and smooth hair, and the red posies in her hand, she looked prettier, did Bridget, 'spite of her thin white cheeks, than I'd seen her for many a year. Then says the lady: "Everything in the room, Tom, is clean, but you—you are very dirty. I should think you felt very uncomfortable, don't you?" Then I looked down on my dirt and rags, and I hung my head in very shame, for I knew I was not even fit to kiss Bridget as she lay there in the nice white bed, nor to come within a mile of the lady. She left me to think a bit, and then she said: "How long have you been drinking, Tom?" And I says: "For ten years, or more, ma'am." And she said: "And before that I dare say you were a fine, honest-looking fellow?" Bridget answered for me there. Said she: "There never was a finer lad walked, my lady, nor a better!" for Bridget had always a good word for me, bless her! Then the lady said: "I thought so. Now, Tom," says she, looking me full in the face and speaking firm-like, as if she meant to have no

nonsense, "you've tried this drink a long time, and what has it done for you? It has made you a ruined, miserable man." And I burst out crying again, for I knew it was true. I *was* ruined, and I *was* miserable; far more miserable than anyone knew. So I cried on, and Bridget cried with me. The lady went away and left us; but when we'd had our cry out, back she came again. "Now, Tom," said she, as bright and cheerful as if we were at the tip-top of happiness instead of at the bottom of misery, "you've tried this drink a long time, and it doesn't do. Now you must try leaving it off." With that she put a pen and a pledge-card in my hand, and told me to sign it. Of course I was bound to. I couldn't have refused, not I! But when I'd done it, I said: "I'll never keep it, ma'am; sure it's Satan himself is in the drink, and he's too strong for me altogether." Says she: "You must ask the good Lord to help you, Tom. Ask Him every five minutes. Every time you hear Satan whispering in your ear that a glass of this terrible drink would be nice, cry aloud to the Lord to come and help you to keep your pledge, and He *will*." She went off again then; but when the time came for me to say good-bye to Bridget, she came after me, and she told me to follow her, and of course I did. At the door of that hospital, Charlie, we were met by a respectable-looking chap dressed in black, with white hair and beard, and he took off his hat to the lady. Says she to him: "This is the man, Tom Mulligan;" and turning to me she says: "Tom, this is James Searle. He's going to help you to keep your pledge. Good-bye. I'll see you again soon," and off she went with a nod and a smile. Why, I might have been the honestest fellow in the kingdom, instead of the biggest wretch. Then that James Searle looked at me, and a pretty customer he must have thought me, but he didn't say so. All he said was: "Tom, you want some new clothes, and you want a good wash. I'll lend you money to buy the one, and I'll take you to some first-rate baths where you can get the other." And sure he did. In an hour from that I wouldn't have known my own face in the glass, I looked that clean and respectable. Then says James Searle: "Now, you want something to eat. You're not to go back to O'Brian's Court; you are to lodge with me for a week or two. Come along, I'll take you home." And he

did. He took me to as snug a home as ever man had, and his wife was there, and his two children, and we'd all tea together. While we were chatting, that James Searle says to me: "Tom, what money can you earn a week?" And says I: "From twenty-five to thirty shillings, when I keep sober, which hasn't been for many a long day." And he says: "I never make a penny more than that last." And I began to think: "Why shouldn't I have a home as good as this, and my wife and child dressed tidy, if it's all done on thirty shillings?" And I thought a lot. In the evening, that James Searle told me I must go along with him to church. I hadn't been inside a church since I was married; but when I heard that I would see my good lady there, and that her own brother was the minister who did all the praying and preaching, I was willing enough to go. I heard a great deal that did me a power of good that night; and when it was over, the lady—Mrs. Dunraven her name is—came and spoke to me, and her brother the minister, Mr. Courtney, came too. And they were so pleasant and kind that I began to think that p'r'aps I wasn't such an out-and-out wretch after all, and that there might be some good in trying to do better. Mr. Courtney, the minister (his church is close by here), took me into the vestry, and he prayed with me, and he told me to pray for myself, and I did. The next morning I went to my work. Wasn't all the chaps surprised to see me in my new clothes, looking so nice! and didn't they make game of me when they heard I'd signed the pledge! I worked for two hours, then I got to feel dreadful thirsty. Satan kept whispering to me how nice a glass of beer would be, just as the lady had said he might be doing. I asked the Lord to help me to keep the pledge for a *bit*; but oh! for a very little bit, for I was too ready by far to listen to Satan; and I was near, mighty near, going to get my glass of beer, when some one puts a hand on my shoulder. It was that James Searle. "I've brought you a drink," says he; "I thought you might be thirsty," and he takes a bottle and a glass from a bag he was carrying. "What is it?" asks I, feeling that sheepish I didn't know where to put my eyes. "Something that will give you strength to work on, and warm you," says he, for it was cold weather then, you mind, Charlie. He poured me out a glassful, and told me to drink



it up, and I did. It was sweet and warm. It made me all in a glow-like. I drank a pint of it, and felt I could do without the beer. I didn't tell James Searle how near I had been getting it ; but I think he knew, for he didn't leave me after that. He kept near me while I was working, and he walked home with me at twelve o'clock, and gave me a good dinner. And he was after me again in the afternoon with some more of his drink. I found out after that his wife made it with sugar and oatmeal and a pinch of ginger. She boiled them in some way together, and made a warm drink of them, good for the winter ; moreover she put something in it that she got from the doctor's, a kind of physic that gives a man strength that's all but ruined his inside with drinking spirits. And I found out, too, how that that James Searle was just one of the Scripture-readers belonging to Mr. Courtney's church, and how that my dear lady, Mrs. Dunraven, had told him to do nothing for a whole month but look after me. I was a different man at the end of that month, I can tell you, Charlie. No drink, and regular meals, was making me as strong and hearty as I used to be years back. And then my money ! how it grew ! Why, I'd paid for my new clothes, I'd paid for my lodgings, and I was getting a nice little sum by me to have a snug bit of a home of my own by the time Bridget and Susie were well enough to come out of the hospital. That is what Mrs. Dunraven has done for me, Charlie. Now, what do you think of that for a guardian angel ?

'Ay,' said Bridget, 'and she didn't leave me alone, neither. When my leg was better, and I came home to Tom, she was after me, teaching me how to be a good wife ; for I was as much in fault as Tom, every bit, down in O'Brian's Court yonder. But Mrs. Dunraven soon put me to rights. She had me attending the mothers' meetings and the Bible classes connected with St. John's, which is the name of Mr. Courtney's church ; and she showed me that a woman should be clean and tidy, and not be after driving her husband to the public-house to look for a bit of comfort and brightness. Then she made us both go to church regular, so that we should get a good start like for the week, and not be forgetting the Lord's goodness, and His promises, and all that the blessed Sabbath was intended to keep bright in our minds.

And when she heard that little Susie there had never been christened (as, of course, me and Tom were, for we both come from a respectable stock, do Tom and me), sure she got her brother, Mr. Courtney, to do it, and make the dear child a real member of the Holy Church. Didn't me and Tom cry that day! She's right good to our poor darling, is Mrs. Dunraven, and so is her kind little girl. They are always doing something or other to try and make her life a bit brighter, bless them! But now, Charlie, let us hear how you have been doing these five years. You seem to have got on just as well as us. How have you managed it?

'Well, I always promised Nelly that I'd be "honest and respectable,"' began Charlie; 'and, of course, I'd to bring Paul up the same;' and he proceeded to relate all that had happened to him, and how he had found a happy home with old Mrs. Vogan. 'I never touch any "drink,"' he added in conclusion; 'not because I've signed the pledge, but because I've no money to waste on it. With the old woman and the lad to provide for, I've plenty to do with every halfpenny I can earn; for my wages are not near so high as Tom's. But if it was "drink" that kept us so dirty, and ragged, and fighting, and miserable in O'Brian's Court, and "drink" that has doubled poor little Susie up like that, and taken the light of the sun from her poor eyes for ever, why, I'll never touch a drop of it as long as I live, from sheer hatred. Nasty, fiery, bewitching stuff! It drags more folks to destruction than anything else in the wide world. Well, I must run off. My work is standing. I'll look in again to-night, Tom; and have some more talk. Good-bye, Bridget. Paul can stay and play with Susie. I'm right glad they've found each other out. Just hear how they are laughing! I declare they're fast friends already. And Paul doesn't take to children in a general way, either. He is a bit odd in his ways, is our Paul.'

## CHAPTER X.

'In My Father's house are many mansions.'—JOHN xiv. 2.

BRIGHT days now dawned both for Paul and Susie. The mutual pleasure they derived from each other's friendship is beyond description. Paul had never been quick to make friends. Quiet and gentle in his habits, perhaps he found his little neighbours too rough and noisy for him. He had always preferred strolling along by himself to joining in their games. They did not understand nor appreciate his quaint ideas and sayings; and he had very early found this out, and learned to like being alone, free to dream and think as he chose without fear of being hurt by rude laughter or jeering remark. Perhaps it was the loneliness he had hitherto experienced that made the charm of having at last found a friend so entirely to his mind as little Susie, so very great. Susie had soon a profound respect for Paul. He could say what he liked to her. He could dream aloud by her side for hours together. Deprived of the sense of sight, she had nothing to do but listen to him; and she thought everything he said wonderfully wise.

Oh, how fond they became of each other! How pleasant were the hours they passed together—sometimes strolling hand in hand along the streets, sometimes sitting at Mrs. Vogan's feet, listening to wonderful stories of what she had done when she was a little girl, and sometimes talking at the door of Bridget's little home. When they each awoke, their first thoughts were of each other. 'See if Paul is coming up the court, mammy,' Susie would say long before her frock was fastened; and 'Get me washed quick, granny; Susie will be waiting,' would be Paul's cry, as he tumbled out of bed.

When Bridget made a cake for Susie, she had to make one for Paul too; and whatever Paul had must be shared with Susie. Moreover he was always on the look-out for something that would interest and amuse her, and seldom went to her empty-handed. Sometimes it was only a stone, or a piece of broken glass or mug, the gay colours of which had, perhaps, attracted his attention as they caught the rays of the sun and lay sparkling in the road. But what made Susie handle such trifles with so much interest, was the curious details he had to tell about them. For nothing

escaped Paul's observation, and no thought was too simple to put into words to Susie. Talking to her was like thinking aloud, and getting pleasant answers from time to time that awoke new ideas.

Susie had, indeed, a great many new ideas to give to Paul. His religious instruction, owing to his circumstances, had been almost entirely neglected. Hers, through the kindness of her good friend Mrs. Dunraven, had been attended to more particularly than is usual with children of her age. But then, she was blind; consequently *thinking* was her chief occupation. It was well to store her mind so that she had plenty to think about. With every story in the Bible, Susie was well familiar. The incidents in the life of our blessed Lord had all been put into language suited to her understanding; and many were the pretty hymns that she had been taught to sing. This was all food for 'thinking;' but what was the charm of 'thinking' compared to the exquisite delight of telling it all to Paul? And how he drank in every word! How he opened his eyes at the story of little Samuel; at the healing of the leper, Naaman; at the casting of the baby Moses on the waters; and what tears he shed over the sufferings of the gentle Saviour!

'Now, Paul!' exclaimed Susie one day, when her simple account of the marvellous death of a powerful God on a cross of wood was suddenly brought to a close by the sound of a quiet sob; 'you are crying again. I won't tell you that story any more. You *always* cry!'

'But the nails must have hurt so bad,' sobbed Paul. 'They shouldn't have put nails through His feet. If I had been there, I wouldn't have let them.'

'Neither would I, if I could have prevented them,' replied Susie. 'But I don't think you and me could have done any good if we had been there; because the Jews were big strong men, and they had made up their minds to kill Him.'

'There are some Jews living in our street,' cried Paul excitedly; 'granny showed me the house, and one of them is a little boy like me. I'll go and knock him down some day, see if I don't!'

'Oh no, Paul!' cried Susie; 'you mustn't do that. You might get hurt. Besides, it is very wrong to knock people down. Mrs. Dunraven says the dear Lord Jesus likes us

to be gentle and kind; and knocking people down isn't being gentle and kind.'

'Bad people *ought* to be knocked down,' persisted Paul; 'and Jews are very bad people. Didn't they kill the good Lord Jesus?'

'Not the Jews who are alive to-day,' replied Susie. 'They had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Dunraven says that God is always pleased when we are kind to the Jews, and try to get them to love the Lord Jesus. That is what we ought to do with them. It is hundreds of years since Jesus died on the cross; how could the Jews in your street have had anything to do with killing Him?'

'I don't care!' cried Paul defiantly; 'they are Jews—granny says so; and I would like to knock them down—I mean the little one.'

'How would you like some one to come and knock *you* down for something bad your daddy had done long before you were born?' asked Susie, after a little consideration.

'I never had a daddy,' replied Paul shortly.

'But supposing you had had a daddy?' continued Susie.

'I don't like supposing,' was Paul's reply.

His tone was a little fretful. It was very clear that he did not intend to be convinced of the innocence of the Jews 'in his street;' so good-natured little Susie gave up the discussion, and said:

'Never mind, Paul; we will talk of something else. I'll tell you a new story; one you have never heard before.'

It was early in the afternoon. The two children were seated outside Bridget's door—Susie in her little chair, and Paul by her side on the pavement. At the welcome news that he was to hear a new story, the ruffled feelings of the latter were immediately calmed; wiping away the tears that were still wet upon his cheeks, he settled himself comfortably to listen.

'There was once a man,' began Susie, 'and his name was Daniel. He was a very good man. He loved God very much; and he was never so happy as when he was saying his prayers. He used to say very long prayers—oh, very long ones indeed.'

'I don't,' put in Paul; 'I just say, "Please, Lord, make Paul honest and 'spectable. Amen."'

'I don't think that *is* a prayer,' replied Susie. 'I never heard one like that. I must teach you *my* prayers, Paul. Shall I say them to you now?'

'No,' replied Paul; 'go on about Daniel,' and obediently Susie continued.

'Well, this Daniel was taken prisoner, and carried a long way off into a strange country, where the people were very wicked. They never said any prayers at all, and they never went to church.'

'Neither do I,' interrupted Paul; 'nor granny, nor Charlie either. We none of us go to church.'

'Then you ought to,' said Susie. 'Mrs. Dunraven says everybody ought to go to church. We all go every Sunday. Daddy carries me. Mr. Courtney prays in church quite aloud. I know his voice. I can hear every word he says; and I like to listen to him. Shall I tell you about the church—what the people sing, and everything?'

'No,' replied Paul again; 'not to-day. I want to hear about Daniel. What did he do in the strange country?'

'He might have been very unhappy,' continued Susie, 'but he wasn't; for the king of the strange country got very fond of him, and was very kind to him. Indeed, he got to like him better than his own people.'

'That was quite right,' observed Paul, nodding his little black head approvingly; 'his own people were bad. Daniel was good; good people ought to be liked. Go on, Susie.'

'His own people were very bad indeed,' continued Susie; 'for when they found out that their king liked Daniel so much, they made up their minds to get rid of him.'

'Get rid of Daniel?' asked Paul, opening his eyes.

'Yes, get rid of poor Daniel,' replied Susie sorrowfully.

'What a shame!' observed Paul, after a short pause. 'Go on, Susie.'

'Well, these wicked men thought and thought how they could get rid of Daniel. They tried very hard to find him out in doing something wrong, so that they could tell tales of him to the king, but they couldn't; for good Daniel never did anything wrong—not the least little thing. At last they hit on a plan.'

'*Did* they?' said Paul, under his breath. (The story was growing interesting.) 'What did they do, Susie?'

'Well, they found out that Daniel used to say his prayers three times a day.'

'That was very often,' said Paul. 'I only say mine once—no, twice—every morning and every night.'

'Daniel said his three times,' continued Susie; 'and when the wicked men found it out, they went to the king and they said, "Oh, king, we want you to make a new law." "All right," said the king; "what is it?" "It is this," said the wicked men; "we want you to make a law, that if anyone says any prayers to anybody but you for thirty days, he shall be thrown into a den of lions." Do you know what a den of lions is, Paul?'

'Yes,' replied Paul, his small hands working nervously with excitement; 'I know. I've seen lions at the 'nagerie. Charlie took me. I was frightened! They roared—oh, so loud!—and they had such big teeth! And they eat people—tear them up into little pieces and eat them! Charlie said so.'

'So they do,' said Susie. 'Well, the king said, "Very well; I'll make this law, if you like."'

'He shouldn't,' put in Paul, wriggling with agitation and interest. 'He should have said, "What a silly law! I won't make it."'

'I think he should too,' went on Susie; 'but he *didn't*. He said he would make it. Then the wicked men said, "But, oh king, you must make this law *very firm*, so that it can't be broken. And if any man dares to break it, you must order him to be thrown into the lions' den." And the king made the law; and he said, "Now the law is made *very firm*; if anybody says a prayer to anyone but me for thirty days, he shall be thrown into the lions' den." Then the wicked men were very glad. Away they ran to Daniel's house, and they found him saying his prayers to God. So they went back to the king, and they said, "Oh king, didn't you make a law, *very firm*, and that mustn't be broken, that if any man says a prayer to anyone but you for thirty days, he shall be thrown into the den of lions?" "Yes," said the king, "I did." "Then, oh king," cried all the wicked men, "send for Daniel, and have him thrown into the lions' den this minute. He does not care a bit for your law, and he is going on saying his prayers to his God all the same." Then

the king was very sorry ; and he went into a room by himself, and he tried all day his very hardest to think of some way to save Daniel. But he couldn't. For, you see, he had made the law, and kings could not break laws they had made themselves.'

'I would have broken it,' exclaimed Paul vehemently.

'So would I,' said Susie ; 'but somehow *this* king couldn't. All the wicked men came round him and said, "Now, king, remember what you said. *You* made the law. Daniel has broken it. Why don't you have him thrown to the lions?" So the poor king sent for Daniel, and he said, "Oh Daniel, I am *very* sorry, but you must be thrown into the den of lions. Perhaps the God you pray to so often will save you. I hope He will ; for I can't." Then the door of the den of lions was opened, and poor Daniel was thrown in. And a great big stone was fastened against the door, so that he could not anyway get out, but would be torn to pieces and eaten up.'

Paul's eyes were dilated with dismay, his lips were twitching, his mouth drawing threateningly downwards, and his bosom heaving. But Susie could see nothing of this, and continued her narrative quietly and gravely.

'Then the wicked men went home, oh, *so* glad ! But the king was dreadfully sorry. He would not eat a thing ; and when he went to bed at night he never slept a bit ! All he could hope was that God had saved poor Daniel, and prevented the savage lions from hurting him. He was longing to know if God had ; so very early in the morning he got up, and he went as quickly as he could to the den of lions, and he began to cry ; and he cried out, "Daniel, Daniel, are you ate ?"'

But here a loud wail from Paul suddenly brought the story to a close.

'Don't, Paul, don't !' cried Susie, throwing her arms round his neck. 'Oh dear, don't cry like that ! He wasn't hurt, Paul, not one bit. God had saved him. *Please* stop crying, Paul. There is nothing to cry for. Daniel wasn't eaten. God had sent some of His angels from heaven, and they had kept the lions from hurting him. Dear Paul, *do* stop crying. I shall cry too, Paul, if you don't stop soon. The king had Daniel taken out of the den, and he took him



home ; and he wasn't a bit the worse. Now *do* stop, Paul. Don't you hear ? Daniel wasn't a bit the worse.'

'And—what—did he—do—to—to—to the wicked m—m—men?' sobbed Paul, wiping his eyes with his little fists.

'Oh,' said Susie, 'the king was so angry with the wicked men that he had every one of them thrown to the lions, and their wives and their little children as well. And the lions jumped on them in a minute, and broke all their bones in pieces, and gobbled them up.'

By the record of this act of vengeance and retribution, Susie thought to satisfy her little companion ; but quite the reverse.

'Oh!—oh!—oh!' he roared louder than ever. 'I knew *some one* would get ate! Oh, the poor little children! Oh, the poor wives! They'd done nothing, and they were gobbled up! Oh dear! why didn't some one pull them out?'

Susie was in despair. Paul was sobbing bitterly. She did her best to comfort him ; but all being in vain, she at last began to shed tears herself, and said reproachfully :

'I wish I hadn't told you about it, Paul. You are very unkind to cry like that over a story. I won't tell you another.'

But Paul no sooner heard her sobs than in some alarm he made a violent effort to control his own ; and in a few seconds recovered himself sufficiently to say :

'Don't you cry, Susie—there's a good girl! I didn't want the little children to be ate ; but it doesn't matter. You stop crying, Susie, and I will too.'

'Well, let us talk of something else, then,' said Susie. 'We've had enough of Daniel ;' and eager to get rid of the painful subject altogether, she cried : 'Let me sing for you, Paul. I know a beautiful hymn you've never heard yet.'

Paul was fond of music. Susie's voice was very sweet, and the tunes she sang very pleasing.

'Yes, do!' he replied instantly, wiping his eyes for the last time, and truly glad to dismiss the horrible picture of the ferocious lions from his imagination. 'I don't like dreadful stories. Sing me a song ; that will be nice.'

And Susie raised her clear little voice and began, Paul keeping time with his hand, and now and then joining in the tune.

'Far above the bright blue sky,  
 Far above the sun so high,  
 There's a home for you and me,  
 Oh, so sweet, and pure and free !  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'There's a Friend so true and brave,  
 Little ones He died to save ;  
 Oh, how happy we shall be,  
 When His loving face we see !  
                                 Far away with Jesu .

'In that land of pure delight,  
 There are golden crowns so bright ;  
 There are harps and there are wings,  
 There are heaps of glorious things,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'There are sweet and lovely flowers,  
 There are leafy forest bowers,  
 Glistening sward and waving trees,  
 Murmuring stream and pleasant breeze,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'Unto mortals 'tis not given  
 To depict the bliss of heaven ;  
 But in that bright land above  
 Well we know that all is love,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'Free from every want and care,  
 Rest and joy await us there.  
 Little children, bright and free,  
 Spend their days so happily,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'Hunger, cold, and weary pain,  
 They shall never feel again ;  
 Children never shed a tear,  
 Children never know a fear,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.

'Little children, bright and glad,  
 Little children, tired and sad,  
 There's a home for every one,  
 Far above the golden sun,  
                                 Far away with Jesus.'

'I like that,' said Paul, as the little girl concluded. 'Sing it again, Susie.'

She was only too pleased to comply. She was never so happy as when doing something that Paul liked. It was the tune that had caught Paul's fancy. It was bright and full of melody. It had quite chased away the melancholy effects

of Daniel's distressing history. His little face, stained as it was with recent tears, bore an expression of the most perfect satisfaction. He was keeping time now with his head and foot, as well as with his hand ; and he joined heartily in the chorus :

‘ Far away—far away—far away with Jesus.’

As time went on, he heard many simple hymns from the blind child's lips ; but he always returned to this one, until at last he knew the words quite well ; then he and Susie sang it together. Mrs. Vogan shed tears of joy, and Charlie was no less delighted, the first time the little fellow sang it through for them.

‘ It reminds me of the days when I was a babe myself,’ remarked the old woman, wiping her eyes. ‘ We used to sing such lots of pretty little hymns at the school.’

‘ It is getting time to be thinking about sending Paul to school,’ remarked Charlie. ‘ I never had the chance myself ; but I don't see how our Paul is to be quite “ respectable ” without a bit of learning ; so next summer we must see about a school. Sing me that again, old chap,’ he added, drawing the boy between his knees.

So Paul sang it again ; and then Charlie observed gravely :

‘ That there home, Paul, that you've been singing about, is heaven, you know.’

‘ Heaven !’ repeated Paul, raising his bright brown eyes to Charlie's ; ‘ that is where the good Lord lives.’

‘ Yes,’ said Charlie, ‘ where the good Lord lives, and where all good lads will go ; lads that are quite “ honest and respectable,” you know, that never tell lies, or say bad words, or nothing. You mind and be a very good little chap, and then when you die——’

‘ But I don't want to die,’ interrupted Paul.

‘ No,’ said Charlie ; ‘ I know that. You are not going to die yet ; but when you *do* die, I mean, if you are a right good lad, as I told you, you will go straight to heaven ; and then you will see all the beautiful things you've been singing about, and the good Lord Jesus, and your dear mammy.’

‘ I haven't got a mammy,’ replied Paul quickly. ‘ This was the very first he had heard of her.’

‘ Haven't you ?’ exclaimed Charlie. ‘ Why, you've got

just the prettiest and the best mammy that any lad ever had. And she is up yonder, in heaven, "far away with Jesus," as your hymn says. And if you want to go to heaven and see her, you must be a very good boy. Only good boys are taken into heaven; bad ones are all shut outside. Mind you always remember that.'

A few minutes later Charlie hurried off to his work, and Paul sat down on the doorstep to think. He had indeed something wonderful to think about now. Lately he had begun to notice that all the children who lived about had each a 'mammy' and a 'daddy'; and he had asked himself two or three times how it was that he had neither. It was a most wonderful and delightful piece of news for him to learn that he was no longer singular in one, at all events, of these respects, but that he had really a 'mammy' of his very own, far away in heaven. Never having felt the want of maternal affection and tenderness, he was quite satisfied to know that she was there. He did not want her; but he felt that her relationship gave him dignity.

'My mammy,' he repeated proudly, again and again; 'then I've got a "mammy," after all, like all the other fellows. I'm *very* glad.'

Then he glanced reverently up at the bright blue sky, and he thought of the country far beyond that, of the land 'far above the golden sun,' now shining brightly upon him, where his mammy was living. He sang the hymn softly over. He had never attended much to the words before; but now they had a strong interest for him, for they were all about heaven, and his mammy was there. He wondered if she had the crown, and the harp, and the wings he had just been singing about; and if she liked the waving trees and the flowers; for to little city-bred Paul flowers and trees appeared the most exquisite of delights. He did not know what 'glistening sward' and 'murmuring stream' meant, so he did not think about *them*. But he knew well what flowers were; for since he had been old enough to go so far, Charlie had been accustomed to take him on Sundays and holidays to spend an hour or so in one of the parks lying outside the City. Here plenty of flowers grew on the beds about; and at first it had been a great disappointment to him that he was not allowed to gather, or even to touch them. He began to

wonder if people could gather the flowers in heaven. He did not see what use they were, if they were only to be looked at, like those in the park. He hoped his 'mammy' was able to gather as many as she liked. How happy she must be if she were! Then his busy imagination conjured up the picture of a happy radiant woman, clad in white, with wings, and crown, and harp, wandering through a forest of flowers of all colours, gathering as she went. His eyes sparkled, his cheeks flushed, and clapping his hands he cried :

'*My* mammy! my own mammy! Oh, what a beautiful, beautiful mammy I've got, "far away with Jesus." I must go and tell Susie.' And off he went.

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## CHAPTER XI.

'And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'—ROMANS xiii. 9.

PAUL was very impatient to tell Susie the wonderful news that he had a 'mammy,' a 'beautiful mammy,' in heaven; so impatient, indeed, that he ran all the way to her little home as fast as ever he could. But when he at last reached the door, and, panting and breathless, burst into the kitchen, the subject, all-important as it was, was quite driven from his mind by finding that she had visitors—distinguished visitors, too, so they appeared to him. That was why he hung shyly back. If they had been of the class he was accustomed to see about him, he would have walked up to them composedly enough, for it was not at all his habit to be bashful with strangers. He was too matter-of-fact for that. But he had never yet been brought in contact with anyone whose social condition was so much superior to his own as that of these guests of Susie's evidently was. So he slipped quietly, and without attracting observation, into a corner by the sofa, and looked on in wondering silence.

A lady, whose hair was beginning to show the silver marks of time, was sitting talking to Bridget; and a little girl, of some eight years of age, was kneeling by blind Susie's small chair. Paul's dark eyes were soon fixed in sparkling admira-

tion upon this little girl. He thought she was wondrously pretty, with her long golden curls and black velvet pelisse—prettier than anyone he had ever seen; and as he saw upon what very friendly terms she appeared to be with Susie, he immediately concluded that this must be the Miss Ethel Dunraven who had once given her a canary, and of whom he had, from time to time, heard a great deal. She was at the present moment talking very earnestly evidently about a cardboard-box that she had placed on Susie's lap. Paul, from wondering what she was saying, and what was in the box, soon drew near to try and find out.

'Now, Susie,' Miss Ethel's clear young voice was saying, 'you can feel quite well with your fingers which are the blue and which are the white, for they are so very different in shape that you can't make a mistake. Here are the needles in this ivory case. They are very coarse, with large eyes, and no sharp points to prick you. They are what we call "rug-needles," for doing wool-work. This is the reel of cotton—feel it: it is crochet-cotton, very strong. Mamma thinks that as you are so often alone, you had better learn to thread the needle yourself; and I think so too; don't you?'

Susie was about to reply, when she was prevented by Paul, who just then laid his little hand upon her shoulder. His curiosity to know what this was all about had become so great, that he had crept round to peep into the box. Susie knew his touch, and turning her sightless eyes towards him, she cried joyfully:

'Oh, I'm so glad you've come, Paul! I've been wishing for you. Just look what our kind lady, Mrs. Dunraven, has sent me.'

Paul knelt down by her side and looked. The box was nearly full of large glass beads, white and blue. The white ones were quite round, and the blue almost square.

'How pretty!' he said. 'What are you going to do with them?'

'I am to thread them,' cried Susie, crimson with pleasure; 'first a round one, and then a square one. Mrs. Dunraven says I am quite old enough to work for the missionaries; and I am to begin to-day. When all these beads are threaded, I am to have sixpence; and that sixpence is going to be sent far, far over the sea, to the poor little black children. And

*I* shall have worked for it. It will be *my* present. Won't that be nice ?

'Yes,' replied Paul ; 'but you need not send it far, far over the sea. There are two little black children live near us. You can give the sixpence to them.'

'Oh, but that would not do,' explained Miss Ethel. 'Little black children who live in England have all they want. I mean they can go to school, and to church, and learn all they ought to know ; but those who live far away, in Africa, have neither school nor churches to go to, and no one to teach them anything. They know nothing about the dear Lord Jesus dying to save them, and nothing about the beautiful home in Heaven that they will go to when they die, if they are good. They don't know that it is wrong to steal, and tell falsehoods, and do other wicked things. It is to teach them all this that the good missionaries go out to them.'

'I don't know what missionishionaries are,' said Paul.

'That's not it, Paul,' corrected Susie ; 'you said it a great deal too long.'

'Never mind,' he cried ; 'tell me what they are.'

'*Missionaries*,' replied the young visitor, 'are good clergymen who leave their own country, and very often all their friends, and travel—oh ! thousands of miles, and endure many hardships, just because they love the good Lord Jesus, and want to teach all the poor black children to love Him too.'

'Yes,' observed Paul ; 'but what do they want with Susie's sixpence ?'

'They want money, of course,' continued Miss Ethel. 'They want it for a great many things ; to build churches and schools, to buy books and clothes, and food too, for the little black children, and to pay schoolmasters and mistresses to teach them.'

'But that will take a lot of money,' observed Susie ; 'sixpence is very little.'

'But every little helps, you know,' continued the visitor, 'and my mamma says that even children ought to do what they can. *I* sew for the little black Africans. I make them shirts and pinafores. You can't see to sew ; but you *can* thread these beads. And when they are threaded, you will

get sixpence, and that sixpence you can send to the missionaries ; so you will be making yourself useful.'

'Yes,' replied Susie ; 'that will be very nice. I think I shall like being useful, very much. But what will be done with the beads when they are all threaded? Do the black children want them?'

'I don't know,' was the answer. 'My mamma did not tell me that. She only said that she thought threading beads would be a little pleasant occupation for you, and would also teach you to use your fingers. You are to thread them in strings just as I told you—first a white bead, and then a blue one. Remember, the white are round, and the blue square. You must feel with your fingers as you go along, if you are putting them all right ; and if you make a mistake, you must undo the string and begin again. Mamma says the sooner children learn to be exact the better. Now try if you can manage. Here is the reel of cotton. Break a piece off. That is too long ; a little shorter. That will do. Now here is your needle. Feel for the eye. There, you have found it. Now try if you can thread it.'

Susie *did* try hard ; but she could not succeed. Although the eye was of course very large, the cotton went first to one side and then to the other ; but go straight through it would not. Little Miss Ethel looked disappointed.

'Mamma was afraid you would not be able to do it,' she said, 'but she thought it would be famous if you could, for it will be so tedious for you to have to wait for some one to come and thread your needles.'

'I can send the cotton through that little hole,' cried Paul ; 'let me do it for her.'

'But you won't be able to do it always for her,' was the answer. 'I am wondering what she will do when she is all by herself.'

'I am never all by myself now,' cried Susie brightly. 'Paul is always with me. He comes first thing in the morning, and he stays with me nearly all day ; and if I want to go for a walk, he takes me.'

'That is very kind of him,' observed the little lady approvingly. 'Who is he? and why do they call him Paul?'

'I don't know who he is,' replied Susie ; 'but mammy



says 'we were often together when we were babies, and then we lost each other, and we were lost for a long time. Now we have found each other again, and we are very happy. We call him Paul, because that is his name.'

'He was *lost*, and his name is *Paul*?' cried the young visitor, with an eager sparkle in her bright eyes. 'I wonder if he can be my nurse's little baby. She lost him. Did your mother ever lose you?'

'No,' replied Paul, to whom the question was addressed; 'my mammy never lost me. She went to heaven.'

'Why, how can you say such a thing, Paul?' cried Susie. 'You know you never had a mammy.'

'Oh, but I had!' he cried joyfully. 'That is what I came to tell you. I have a beautiful mammy; but she lives in heaven. She is an angel, far away with Jesus, you know. And she has a crown, and wings, and all that you sing about. Oh, I am so glad! Aren't you glad, too, Susie?'

'I am indeed, dear,' was her hearty reply.

And little Miss Ethel, willing to share their delight, observed:

'So am I—*very*. And yet,' she added thoughtfully, 'I don't know. I think I would rather have found out that you are the little baby Paul that my poor nurse lost. She would have been so glad. I think she would have gone mad with joy. She is always praying to God to help her to find him; perhaps He will some day. But I am very glad to see you, although you are not *that* Paul; for I never saw a *Paul* before. I did not know there were any. In all my life, I have only heard of two. One was my nurse's lost baby, and the other was a very good man. He was a saint. His name was *St. Paul*. I have a book at home about him; full of beautiful pictures. I will bring it with me next time I come, and show them to you. Ah! but I forgot; Susie can't see.'

'No,' replied Susie. 'I know what a book is; but what are pictures?'

'Pictures are drawings of what we see around us. Those in my book about St. Paul are beautifully coloured.'

'I don't understand yet what *pictures* are,' said Susie; 'if I felt one, should I know what it was?'

'No,' replied the little lady; 'I don't think you would.'

It would only feel like a piece of paper. There will be no use in bringing my picture-book after all. I am sorry. You would have been so pleased with it.'

'Perhaps Paul would like to see it,' said Susie. 'He can see everything; and he likes pretty things. Will you please bring it for him to look at?'

'Yes,' was the ready answer. 'Are you fond of pictures, Paul?'

'Yes,' he replied—'very. Here—the needle is threaded; tell Susie what to do with it.'

The attention of all three was now fixed upon the box of beads.

'Tie one of the white beads at the end of the cotton,' instructed the little lady, 'so that the others cannot slip off.'

'The white are round, aren't they?' observed Susie, feeling with fingers trembling with delight in the box.

'Yes; and the square ones are blue,' explained Paul.

'Then this is a white one,' said Susie, holding up a round bead, and she proceeded to tie it at the end of her needleful of cotton, asking as she did so: 'Is that right?'

Paul, who was watching her with great eagerness, cried out: 'Quite.'

'What must I do now?' asked Susie.

'Begin to thread,' replied Miss Ethel. 'Let me see—you have commenced with a white bead; now you must put a blue one.'

'That will be square,' cried Susie, searching for the required shape.

'Yes,' replied the little visitor; 'there, you have found one! Quite right! Put the needle through the hole—splendid! Now another white one.'

'That is blue!' cried Paul, as Susie took the wrong bead. 'Here, take this; this is white.'

'No, no, Paul!' interposed Miss Ethel. 'Let her find them herself. Mamma said no one was to help her.'

'I don't want any help,' cried Susie, brimful of joy. 'I can do it first-rate.'

So she could. They watched her in silence find and thread about a dozen beads; then the little lady stopped her.

'Wait, Susie,' she said; 'you have put three white beads together. That won't do. You must have first a white one

and then a blue, all the way along. Mamma said you were not to make *one* mistake.'

'These are the only two that are wrong,' said Susie, after drawing her fingers carefully over her work, 'and I can easily take them off.'

'Yes; but you have pulled the cotton out of the needle,' cried Paul. 'Here, give it to me; I will thread it again for you.'

When this was done, blind Susie worked steadily for some five minutes. She did not make another mistake, and the string of beads began to get quite long.

'How pretty they look,' said Paul presently. 'Which do you like the best?'

The question was of course addressed to the little lady.

'The blue, I think,' she replied.

'So do I,' he said; 'but the white are very pretty too. Isn't it a pity that Susie can't see them? And it is no use trying to tell her what they are like. She can't think what "blue" and "white" are. I tried to tell her once what "yellow" was, but I couldn't. And I don't believe anyone could tell her what "blue" is either.'

'Never mind,' cried Susie brightly, 'I don't want to know. I can feel and thread these beads, that is all I care about.'

'Do you like threading them?' asked Miss Ethel. 'Does it amuse you?'

'Oh, *so* much!' was the grateful reply. 'I think it is splendid!'

Susie's small white face looked brilliant with happiness.

'I am very glad,' replied Miss Ethel, with a smile of pleasure. 'Mamma will be pleased. She was wondering and wondering what would be a nice little employment for you. She thought you must be so dull sitting in your chair all day long doing nothing. I will write and tell her that you are pleased, and that you can thread the beads quite cleverly already.'

'And will you please tell her that Paul will thread my needles for me, till I learn to do it myself?'

'Yes,' was the reply, 'I will.'

'And will you tell her that I shall be so glad to send the sixpence to the poor little black children?'

'Oh yes! I won't forget to tell her that.'

'And will you please ask her to come and see me very soon? She has not been for so long—not once since Paul found me, and that is many, many weeks ago.'

'That is because we have been in France,' replied Miss Ethel. 'I only came home two days ago, and mamma won't come for another fortnight.'

'Isn't that your mamma?' asked Paul, pointing to the lady who was still sitting talking to Bridget.

'Oh no,' she replied; 'my mamma is nothing like that. That lady is Miss Langton, my governess. She teaches me my lessons; but I learn very few now. I was ill in the winter. That is the reason mamma took me to France. I am not quite strong yet, and the doctor says I am to be in the open air as much as possible; so I go out twice a day—every morning and every afternoon.'

'Where do you go?' asked Paul, who never lost an opportunity of asking a question.

'To the park,' she replied, 'every day—except when we go for a sail on the river. There are no nice walks about this place; but I have a beautiful home a long way from here, and we shall be going there soon—when mamma comes back. I shall be very glad. There is a beautiful shore there, that I play upon. I watch the tide come rolling in, and I find pretty shells and stones. And then there are woods, where I gather ferns and wild flowers, and where the birds build their nests, and teach their little ones to fly, and where pretty butterflies fly about, and where glow-worms shine in the evening, and the nightingale sings, and all is so beautiful. I shall be glad when the time comes for me to go back to that home. I like it so much better than this city. My favourite nurse—the one who lost her poor baby—is there, too; and she will be so glad to see me again. Are you quite sure that you are not her little Paul? she always told me her baby's name was Paul. Try and think very hard. Did your mammy never lose you?'

He shook his black, curly head very decidedly.

'My mammy went to live in the beautiful heaven,' he replied; 'and when I die, I shall go there too and see her.'

'Only very good people go to the great God's beautiful heaven,' observed the little visitor reverently. 'Mamma

told me that the Bible says so. If you want to go *there* Paul, you must be a very good boy.'

'Yes,' he replied, a look of gravity overspreading his little face, 'I know that. I'm going to be very good indeed; because I want to go to heaven and see my mammy. She is *there*.'

'When did she go?' asked Susie.

'Oh, years and years ago,' he replied; 'when I was quite a little, little baby, ever so small. I wish she'd waited till I was big enough to see her.'

'Perhaps she would have done, if she had had anything to do with it,' observed Miss Ethel, who being the eldest of the three felt justified in assuming the tone of instructor; 'but she had not. The people of this world are obliged to leave it the moment they are sent for—whether they are old or young—prepared or unprepared. My uncle told me so, and he is a clergyman, and knows all about it. He says that is the reason we should always try to be very good, and remember the vows that were made for us when we were christened, and try to act up to them.'

'What is "christened"?' asked Paul, his curiosity being aroused by the new word.

'It is when we were taken to church, and water was sprinkled on our faces by the clergyman, and the "cross" of the dear Lord Jesus was signed on our foreheads,' explained the young visitor: and she added: 'All good children, who hope to go to the beautiful heaven, and love the Lord Jesus who died that we might live there for ever, ought to be christened.'

'Ought they?' said Paul gravely; '*I* have never been christened, and I am a child who hopes to go to the beautiful heaven.'

'Then you ought to be!' was Miss Ethel's firm reply; 'it is most important.'

'But why?' he asked.

'Because, when we are *not*, we are disobeying the dear Lord,' she replied. 'He said all those who loved Him were to be christened—and it is very wrong not to be.'

'Did you ever hear anything like this, Susie?' asked Paul, a little anxiously.

'Oh yes, dear!' she replied. 'It is all quite true.'

'But you have never been christened, Susie?'

'Oh yes, I have, dear. Did I never tell you about it? Miss Ethel's mamma, our good Mrs. Dunraven, had me christened soon after mammy and I came out of the hospital—the time we had been hurt and my back and my eyes were spoiled, you know. Mrs. Dunraven stood godmother for me—which means that she undertook to see that I was taught everything I ought to know about the Lord Jesus: how He died for me on the cross, and how I must spend my whole life in trying my hardest to please Him.'

Paul was beginning to look very unhappy. He felt, for the first time, that something was wrong with him. Susie had been christened. Little Miss Ethel had said that *all good children* who loved the Lord Jesus ought to be christened; and yet he had never been. Then he did not belong to the class of good children who loved the dear Lord Jesus, who died on that cruel cross; and *Susie did*. This was a great trouble for him. He sat thinking it over—sad and thoughtful. By-and-by Susie continued:

'Mrs. Dunraven told me that when I was christened, I was made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."'

This was all beyond Paul's comprehension, so it failed to interest him.

'I don't want to know about that,' he said fretfully.

'Very well, dear, you shan't,' was good-natured little Susie's immediate reply. 'Look, how nicely I'm threading my beads! I haven't made another mistake; have I?'

'I don't know!' cried Paul; 'I don't want to look. I want to hear some more about this "christen." Did a minister christen you, Susie?'

'Yes, dear; Mr. Courtney christened me, and he is a minister.'

'Mr. Courtney is my uncle,' put in Miss Ethel; but Paul's eagerness would not allow him to take any notice of the information.

'Did he christen you in a church?' he continued anxiously to Susie.

'Yes, love. You know the church. Don't you remember when we were out with mammy the other day, she said: "This is the church where my Susie was christened"?''

'Oh yes!' cried Paul, 'I remember; I know the church. It is a great big grey house with railings all round, and a loud bell on Sundays. So it was there the minister sprinkled water on your face and marked the "cross" of the Lord Jesus on your forehead, was it?'

'Yes,' replied Susie simply; 'but your voice sounds sorry, Paul. What is the matter? Are you sad?'

'I think I am,' he replied. 'I am thinking about this "christen" very much.'

'Well, what about it, love?' she asked.

'I am wondering,' he said, 'if anybody ever took *me* to the church and got the minister to sprinkle water on *my* face and mark the "cross" of the kind Lord Jesus on *my* forehead.'

'I dare say they did, dear,' she replied cheerfully.

'I think they must have done,' put in little Miss Ethel. 'Children are christened, Paul, when they are quite young babies. I have seen them in my uncle's church, oh, very often! I am nearly sure you were christened when you were a little baby.'

'I don't know,' he replied gravely. 'I think if I had been some one would have told me. I had better go and ask granny; she will know.' And before Susie could say a word to detain him he was running quickly down the street.

When he returned, half an hour later, he found his little blind friend all alone. She told him that Bridget was out buying daddy some supper, and that Miss Langton and little Miss Ethel had gone home soon after he left.

'I have been waiting for you, Paul,' she added, 'to thread my needle. It came undone soon after mammy went out, and I have tried and tried, but I can't do it myself.'

Paul soon sent the cotton through the large eye.

'You don't talk,' said Susie, as he placed the needle once more in her little hand; 'I am *sure* you are sad. What is it, dear?'

'Yes,' replied Paul, with a long sigh, 'I am very sad indeed.'

'Why, what's the matter?' cried Susie, in consternation, letting her string of beads fall idly to her lap, and turning her sightless eyes towards him; 'I thought you would be quite pleased because you've seen my Miss Ethel Dunraven, our kind lady's little girl. Don't you like her?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'very much. I think she is beautiful, and her clothes are beautiful too. But oh, Susie, granny says she doesn't think I've ever been christened. She says Charlie will know, and we are going to ask him to-night; but she doesn't think I have,' and he heaved another deep sigh.

'Come close to me, Paul,' said Susie; 'I want to put my arms round your neck and give you a kiss;' and when their two soft cheeks lay side by side she whispered: 'Don't be sad, love; dear Paul, don't be sad. I am sure you couldn't be nicer if you had been christened ever so!'

'Oh yes I could!' he replied. 'Miss Ethel told me that the Lord Jesus said all the children who loved Him were to be christened. And I love Him, Susie. I love Him because the nails must have hurt His poor hands and feet so much, and because He said we might all go and live in His beautiful heaven and be happy for ever. That is why I love the good Lord Jesus, and I would like to do as He said. I would like to be christened like you.'

He drew another sigh, and seemed so cast down that Susie was quite distressed. After vainly endeavouring to comfort him for some ten minutes she at last gave up in despair, and thought it would be better to take his attention from the subject by talking of something else. So she gave him another kiss, and speaking very cheerfully said:

'Now I'll go on with my beads; and you watch that I don't make a mistake, and I'll tell you a story.'

'I'll watch that you don't make a mistake,' replied Paul; 'but I am very sad indeed to-day, and I don't want to hear a story.'

'But this is a very nice story,' cried Susie. 'It is about a great big fish swallowing a man; but he got out again without being hurt a bit; so you need not cry about it.'

'Who got out again?' asked Paul, opening his eyes with awakening interest—'the fish?'

'No,' said Susie; 'the man. You just listen and I'll tell you all about it. It is a beautiful story.'

So Paul heard the marvellous history of Jonah—and very wonderful he thought it. As he sat listening with rapt attention he quite forgot his new trouble, but no sooner was the story concluded than it all returned. He could not



reconcile himself to the fact that Susie had been christened by a minister and that he had not.

'Shall I sing for you, dear?' asked the blind child by-and-by, finding him once more silent and absorbed.

'Yes,' he said; 'do.'

'What shall I sing, love?'

"'Far away with Jesus,'" was his instant reply. 'I like that best of all.'

So Susie sang the simple little hymn; but to her disappointment he did not join her at all this time. He let her sing it through quite by herself, and when she had finished he observed with another sigh:

'It must be very beautiful, that country of the great God's, "far above the golden sun." My angel mammy is there. I don't know what I shall do if I don't go there too.'

'But you *will* go there some day, Paul,' she cried; 'of course you will. The dear Lord Jesus will take everyone who loves Him to heaven—and you love Him, dear.'

'Oh yes,' he replied; 'I know that. But He said I ought to be christened, like you; and perhaps He will think me very disobedient, and be angry.' His dark eyes grew moist with the sad thought, and a little sob broke from his bosom as he murmured: 'I am so sorry that I have never been christened.'

'You don't know, love,' cried Susie eagerly. 'You have not asked Charlie yet. I dare say he took you to a church and had you christened when you were quite a little baby, and knew nothing at all about it.'

There was hope in this suggestion. Paul brightened up, and to Susie's delight once more chatted pleasantly. By-and-by he took her for a little walk, and then remained with her until five o'clock, when Bridget came back with her purchases, and he ran home to his granny. But he would not go into the house. He stood outside, his eyes fixed on the end of the street that he might see the moment Charlie turned the corner. For quite an hour he stood patiently watching and waiting. At last he caught sight of his well-known figure, and joyfully ran to meet him.

'Well, young un,' said Charlie, as the little fellow, all breathless, reached his side. 'What brings you in such a hurry?'

'I have been waiting to ask you,' began Paul, as he slipped his little hand into Charlie's great hard one, and trotted along by his side, 'if you ever took me to church when I was a little baby, and asked a minister to christen me?'

'Christen,' repeated Charlie, his bright smile giving way to a serious look—'christen! Why, if this isn't the very first time I've heard that word since poor Nelly left us. Who has been telling you about "christen," Paul?'

'Susie's little Miss Ethel,' replied Paul; 'she came to see her this afternoon, and brought her some pretty beads. Then I have never been christened at all, Charlie?'

The little voice was very anxious in asking this question, but Charlie was too taken up with his own thoughts to notice it.

'No,' he replied absently, 'you haven't. Well, it is strange too that *you* should bring this word up again. Why, I had forgotten all about it.'

'Forgotten what?' asked Paul.

'All about "christen,"' replied Charlie. 'No, Paul; you have never been christened. You would have been if your poor mammy had lived; for she was always talking about it. But she went to heaven, you see, and left you with me, and of course I knew nothing about christening; and so it was never done.'

Charlie began to whistle after saying this, and very soon he had forgotten the subject. But not so Paul; he was silent, grave, and unhappy. When he had had his tea he crept away by himself to think it all over. His mammy, his beautiful angel-mammy, would have had him christened. She knew all about it, how the good Lord Jesus had commanded it; only she went to heaven too soon, and couldn't have it done.

What a pity! At night, when he was all alone, watching the quiet moonbeams stream through the small window of the humble room where he lay in bed, his thoughts flew to the fair country 'far above the golden sun,' and to the crowns, and wings, and flowers that Susie sang about, and to his mammy, who was a bright angel, and to the dear Lord Jesus, who had died so cruel a death that little boys like himself might go to His beautiful heaven. Soon two big

tears rolled from under his fast-closing eyelids as, half asleep, he murmured something about his being 'so sorry.' A few minutes later he slept—and then he dreamed.

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## CHAPTER XII.

'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of God.'—MARK x. 14.

It was not strange that little Paul should dream of the subject that had taken so strong a hold upon him ; and a very comforting dream he had. Five minutes after the bright morning sun had touched his closed eyelids, and opened them to the light of another day, he had settled all his perplexities to his entire satisfaction ; and it was in a hearty voice that he responded to Mrs. Vogan's usual call, and, jumping out of bed, began to draw on his simple clothes. He knew what he was going to do. And how easy it appeared ! He had done it all in his dream, and now he would do it in earnest. Wouldn't Susie be pleased !

'Come, Paul,' cried Mrs. Vogan again ; 'your breakfast is going cold.'

And he replied : 'All right, granny ;' and ran merrily downstairs, putting on his jacket as he went. 'What day is this, granny?' he asked, as he munched his bread and butter.

'Sunday, dearie,' was her answer.

'I thought so,' he said. 'Then the churches will be open to-day, granny?'

'Yes, love.'

'What do people go to church for, granny?' he asked again.

'To pray, love.'

'You never go, granny?'

'Eh, my ! no, dearie !' she replied. 'Church is too grand a place for the likes of poor old me.'

'Is it a *very* grand place, granny?'

'Yes, dear ; folks that go to church should be very neat, and dressed in their best.'

'Oh,' he ejaculated gravely ; 'I'm very glad you've told

me *that*. I didn't know,' and he continued his meal in silence. A few minutes later, he sprang from his chair, crying: 'Come and wash me, granny. I want to be very clean this morning.'

'Have you had enough breakfast?' she asked, as she got soap and water.

'Oh yes,' he replied, taking off his jacket and baring his neck. 'Scrub away now, granny. I want to be *very* clean.'

Paul was not generally so particular; in fact he was apt to be rather impatient over his daily ablutions. Mrs. Vogan wondered why he was so hard to please this morning. Three times had she to wash his face before he would be satisfied that it was quite clean; then he made her brush his black curls until her arm ached; and then he asked for his best cap.

'Where are you going to, dearie?' she inquired, when he was at last ready.

'Out on business,' he replied, using the words he had often heard fall from Charlie's lips, and feeling very important as he did so.

'Are you going to little Susie, love?' she asked again.

'Not yet,' he answered. 'I've some partic'lar business to do first.'

Old Mrs. Vogan, quite satisfied that the 'partic'lar business' was some trifling arrangement between him and the blind child, smiled kindly as he said this, and let him go off without further remark. But Paul had been quite in earnest when he had spoken of his particular business. He ran quickly along the quiet streets—for early on Sunday mornings the streets even of that large city were quiet, traffic was suspended, and most of the busy workers of the week were still resting in their beds. Away went Paul, and never stopped until he reached the grey stone church where blind Susie said she had been christened. There had been an early celebration of the Holy Communion. The service was over. Those who had been joining in it had gone to their several homes, and the old sexton was just finishing his duties connected with the sacred table, when he heard the outer door open and close again with a loudly echoing bang. Going hastily to learn the cause, he found Paul, barefooted and cap in hand, standing in the porch.

'What are you doing to the door?' he asked crossly, for

he wanted his breakfast, and the want made him a little irritable.

‘It is such a heavy door,’ replied Paul simply. ‘I could hardly push it open; and then it slipped from my hand and banged.’

‘But what were you doing near it?’ continued the old man. ‘What did the likes of you want pushing it open at all?’

‘I wanted to come in,’ replied Paul; and, without waiting for further remark, he walked quietly past the sexton into the aisle beyond, and there stood gazing in amazement around him. ‘So this is a church!’ he exclaimed under his breath. ‘This is one of the great God’s houses! How beautiful!’

No wonder he felt awe-struck. The first glimpse of that church was enough to strike awe into a much stronger brain than poor little fanciful Paul’s. The windows were all richly stained, representing various scenes in the life of our blessed Saviour; and the morning sun was streaming through the tinted glass, casting rays of purple, crimson, and other bright colours in all directions; here falling upon the dark carved oak of the pews, there upon the massive marble pillars, and again upon the brilliant tiled flooring. Paul had never been in such a big place before. He had never thought that there *could* be such a big place, and, in contrast to Mrs. Vogan’s simple little home, this old church was indeed overpowering in the grandeur of its size and beauty. So, however, Paul felt it to be, as he glanced with wide-opened eyes at the arched roof so far above him, and at the pulpit and reading-desk with their velvet drapery, and at the golden organ afar off, and at the white font with the sculptured cherubs holding it, and the gentle dove hovering near. Then the holy table, with the fair linen cloth still spread, caught his eyes, and the high-backed carved chairs, and the gilded letters of the Ten Commandments upon the marble tablets behind. He had never dreamed of anything like this; and as his glance travelled still higher, and rested upon the large eastern window above, his wonder found vent in a loudly-murmured ‘Oh!’

The subject of the window interested him greatly. It was the blessing of the little children. The Saviour was standing in the centre, clad in robes of richest crimson, and around Him were little ones of all ages, from a babe of a

few months, held eagerly forward by its kneeling mother, to a lad of about nine, whose only covering was a sheep-skin artistically slung across one shoulder, and upon whose clustering curls the Redeemer's hand was laid.

Paul was so impressed with the scene that he advanced quite close to the communion rails, where he remained gazing upon it in silent admiration. The old sexton, who was kind-hearted and patient enough under ordinary circumstances, had been watching him all this while with mingled interest and amusement. Now, marking his wondering gaze, he came up to his side, and asked :

'Well, youngster, what are you looking at?'

'Him,' replied Paul, stretching out his little arm to point to the face of the Saviour.

'You mustn't say *Him*,' replied the sexton gravely, 'when you are pointing at the blessed Lord who died for you.'

'Is *that* the blessed Lord?' cried Paul eagerly, pointing again.

'Yes. Who else should it be?'

'Not the good Lord Jesus?' continued Paul inquiringly.

'Yes; the good Lord Jesus,' replied the sexton. 'Who else could you take it for?'

'I don't know,' said Paul; 'but I didn't think it was the Lord Jesus.'

'And why didn't you?' asked the sexton, growing more and more interested in this bright-eyed mite of a lad, who spoke with the assurance of the vicar himself. 'Don't you think it is nice enough for the holy Lord?'

'It is very nice,' was Paul's quiet reply; 'but I don't think it is like the good Lord Jesus.'

'How do you know?' asked the old man in amazement.

'Because,' replied Paul thoughtfully, 'I think the Lord Jesus is dressed all in white, and with a deal of light-like about Him.'

The sexton imagined he was taking his description from some Sunday-school pictures, and replied :

'The blessed Saviour is not always painted in the one colour, my lad. I call this window just lovely, and I think the Lord looks grand! Look what a smile the clever man who painted it has put on His holy face! He did that because he knew He was very pleased the time He had all

those children gathered around Him ; and He *was* pleased. Do you know what He is doing to them ?

'No,' replied Paul ; 'is He telling that little boy with the sheep-skin to go home and get properly dressed ? He shouldn't have come to the Lord like that, should he ?'

The old man paused for some seconds before he could make up his mind what reply it would be best to make to this speech. Then, concluding that Paul's objection to the sheep-skin was after all extremely natural to his years and circumstances, he thought he could not do better than humour it, and therefore observed :

'I dare say that little fellow hadn't time to put his other clothes on. P'raps he was in bed, and heard that the good Lord was passing through the street, and jumped up, and caught hold of the first thing he saw, which happened to be a sheep-skin, and flung it round him and ran out, for fear the Lord would be gone, you know.'

'I would have asked him to wait a bit,' replied Paul gravely, 'while I got my best jacket and cap.'

The old sexton shook his white head. 'It's a mighty risk to ask the Lord to *wait a bit*,' he said, speaking more to himself than to the boy. 'We're too ready to do that, all of us. "Wait a bit—wait a bit !" we cry, from the time we leave our cradles till we get on to our death-beds. And then we get frightened, miserable cowards that we are, and we call on Him to "wait a bit" no longer, but to come to us sharp. And then of course we expect Him to come, for all the world as if *we* were the master and *He* the servant ; and that's just where it is with every one of us.' And then he patted Paul's head, and said aloud : 'No, no, lad ; when your heart tells you, as it will time after time, that the blessed Lord is anywhere near, don't be after asking Him to "wait," but run to Him as fast as you can. And He will serve you as He is serving yonder little lad in the window ; He will put his blessed hand on your head and bless you.'

'No, I am afraid He won't,' was Paul's eager cry, turning his back upon the window, for these words of the sexton's had reminded him of the object he had had in coming to the church that morning, which until now he had forgotten in the novelty and beauty of his surroundings. 'I don't think the Lord will have anything to do with me,' he con-

tinued excitedly, 'because I have not obeyed Him. That is just what brought me here. I want the minister.'

'*You* want the minister,' repeated the sexton in surprise. 'Why, what can a bit of a babe like you, whose head doesn't come much above my knee, want with the minister?'

'I want him—partic'lar,' was all Paul could find to reply.

'Is anyone belonging to you sick?' inquired the sexton.

'No,' cried Paul, 'we are all quite well, thank you; but I want the minister. Isn't this a church? Where is the minister?'

The sexton pointed to a door at the other side of the building, and said:

'He is there, in the vestry yonder, taking off his surplice. But he has a hard day's work before him; I can't have him troubled for nothing. You must tell me what you want.'

This good old man with his hoary head, his white flowing beard, and his threescore and ten years, had known the minister from boyhood, and looked upon it as quite a part of his business to try and prevent him from being, what he called, over-worked. But Paul found it difficult to reply to this question. He could not put into words all the various ideas that were filling his brain; so after a good deal of hesitation all he replied was: 'I want the minister.'

'Who sent you?' asked the sexton.

'No one,' said Paul; 'I came myself.'

'Is it "relief" you're after? Do you want any money?'

'No,' replied Paul, shaking his small black head, 'I don't want any money; I only want the minister.'

The sexton surveyed him for a moment or two in perplexed silence, then he spoke:

'If our Mister Courtney now,' he said, 'wasn't just set upon what he calls "throwing crumbs to the Lord's sparrows," which is his way of talking of taking the precious gospel to such as you, I'd send you off quicker than you came, before I'd have him troubled on a Sabbath morning, with such a day's work as he has before him. But if I did, he'd be certain to find it out sooner or later, and he might be vexed, so come along.'

Paul followed him as he led the way to the vestry, where, after knocking on the door that was standing ajar, he said: 'Beg pardon, sir, but here's the curiousest bit of a sparrow



that I ever came across yet. He's walked into the church all by himself, sir, and all I can get out of him is that he wants the minister.'

'Where is he?' asked the clergyman, putting down his hat which he had just taken up preparatory to leaving for home.

'He is here by me, sir; but he can't want much, he's too little. I had better tell him to come to-morrow, hadn't I? You'll do well to get home to your breakfast. It is close on nine.'

'Five minutes or so will make no great difference,' replied the clergyman. 'Where is the child? Let him come here to me.'

And accordingly the old sexton took little Paul by the shoulders, and gently pushed him into the vestry, closing the door behind him. The Reverend Gerald Courtney stood for a few seconds looking curiously from his six feet one, at the three feet nothing upon the carpet. Then he said encouragingly:

'Well, my little fellow, and what do you want with the minister?'

Paul looked up into the kind face bending over him, and replied by asking:

'Are *you* the minister, sir?'

'Yes,' was the answer, 'I am. Well, what is the matter? You don't appear to be forming a very favourable opinion of me.'

This observation was called forth by Paul's grave, suspicious looks. He was not at all sure that all was right, and the expression of his little face said so very plainly. He had certainly not made up his mind what appearance a minister would actually present; but blind Susie, in their many talks upon such matters, had led him to expect something more out of the common than this gentleman, whose long black coat was after all very similar to hundreds of others he saw daily in the streets. He looked very disappointed, as, pouting his rosy lips, he said:

'I didn't think a minister was like *you*, anyhow.'

'I don't please-you,' exclaimed the clergyman, a smile of amusement flickering about his lip. 'I am sorry for that. I am afraid you are very particular. What did you think a minister would be like?'

'Susie told me that they were the great God's own servants,' replied Paul, 'and I thought they all *looked* like His servants, all white, and light, you know.'

The clergyman *did* know, that was very evident, for the jocular expression left his features, as he replied kindly :

'Susie was quite right, my little friend. Ministers *are* the great God's servants; and they wear white sometimes, but not always. When they are in the church, which is God's house, praying to Him, or reading the Holy Bible to His people, they put on white; but when they go outside into the streets, they take off their white things and put on black ones. You can understand that, can you not?'

Paul's grave face brightened. 'Oh yes,' he cried, 'that is easy to understand. Then, sir, you *do* wear white sometimes, and you are quite a proper minister?'

'I wear white very often,' replied the clergyman, 'and I am quite a proper minister.'

'A *real* minister; one of the great God's ministers?' persisted Paul.

'Yes,' was the answer, 'a *real* minister. I trust, indeed, one of the great God's ministers, even as you say, my child.'

Paul looked immensely relieved. He drew a sigh of satisfaction as he cried :

'Then it is all right. I am very glad. I was afraid there was a mistake somewhere.' Then he advanced a step nearer, and continued very eagerly : 'Please, minister, I want you to make that "cross" on my forehead.'

He quite expected that what appeared to him so very simple a request, would be not only immediately understood, but also complied with, and very surprised he looked when he was gently asked to explain himself.

'I thought you would know what I mean,' he replied impatiently. 'You did it to Susie.'

'I did *what* to Susie?' asked the clergyman.

'You put the "cross" on her forehead,' said Paul, 'she told me you did. I forget what you call it; but I want one put on mine. I have come to the church, and I have got to the minister. It is all right. It won't take a minute. Put it on, please,' and brushing his hair from his brow, he raised his head, and stood waiting.

The clergyman saw at once that there was something in

this strange request that would require careful looking into. Sitting down in his chair, he drew the boy to him, and began by asking :

‘What is your name?’

‘Paul,’ was the ready answer.

‘Paul what?’

‘Paul nothing—just Paul. That’s my name.’

‘Well, then, my little Paul, tell me what “cross” it is you want me to put on your forehead.’

‘Why, the cross of the good Lord Jesus who died,’ was the answer.

‘And why do you wish the sign of the Lord marked on your brow, my child?’

Paul looked surprised. He rubbed his little foot impatiently on the carpet as he said :

‘I thought a minister would know all about it. The Lord Jesus said it was to be done, so please do it quick,’ and once more he brushed his hair aside, and raised his head.

Never had the clergyman found himself so puzzled in dealing with any poor believer as he was now with the simple child standing between his knees. He evidently wanted something, and something to which he attached great importance ; for he was almost quivering with eagerness as he waited for it. But what was it? *The Lord Jesus said it was to be done.* What *could* the boy mean? After a few seconds spent in hasty consideration he observed that the bright young eyes were fixed at this moment on *his* brow, so with a view of getting a little light thrown upon what he found so impossible to understand, he observed :

‘Is there a “cross” marked on my forehead?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Paul. ‘I don’t see one ; but it may be there, for all that. I can’t see the one on Susie’s forehead, and yet she says one was put there ;’ and then, observing an almost pained expression on the clergyman’s kind face, he added : ‘You ought to know yourself if the “cross” is on *your* forehead. Was it ever put there? When you were a little, little baby, wasn’t it put there?’

The clergyman thought a moment ; then a bright light suddenly broke upon him, and he replied :

‘Yes, Paul ; of course it was. The sign of the “cross”

of the Lord Jesus was marked on my brow when I was a little child, very much smaller than you.'

'Ah, I thought so,' said Paul. 'It must have been when you were a little baby. Susie said the "cross" ought to be marked on all little babies' foreheads. It would have been put on mine, only my mammy died too soon. Please put it on now.'

'Do you mean will I baptize you, my little Paul?' asked the clergyman gently.

'Oh no,' cried Paul; 'I don't mean that at all. What I want you to do to me *has* a name. Susie called it something; but it wasn't "baptize;" it was "chris—chris—" I forget what.'

'Christen,' suggested the clergyman, as the happy word immediately occurred to him.

Paul beamed with delight. 'That is it; that is it,' he cried joyfully. 'Susie was christened in this church. I want to be christened too—"water," you know, sprinkled on my face, and a "cross" marked just here on my forehead. Then the dear Lord Jesus will know I have obeyed Him. Christen! Yes, that is it! I had forgotten its name. Please christen me quick!'

Overwhelming was his disappointment when told that this was impossible, at all events just then. It was in vain the clergyman tried to explain that there was much to be done before the sacrament of baptism could be performed; that it would be necessary to consult his friends, and to learn if it were really true that he had not been already baptized. Paul could not or would not see anything except that he had not yet obeyed the dear Lord Jesus in being sprinkled with the water of baptism, and marked with the sign of the sacred 'cross;' and when at last convinced that the clergyman had no intention of complying with his repeated demand, his grief and disappointment found vent in a torrent of tears. All his trouble of the night before seemed to return, only with tenfold strength; for then he had slept, and dreamed, and awoke to plan out in his young mind this very visit to the church, and now the visit seemed to have been made in vain. Poor little Paul! He wept bitterly. The clergyman was both distressed and perplexed. All his attempts at consolation were useless; so he turned

to the old sexton (who had hurried in consternation to the vestry on hearing the sounds of Paul's noisy grief), and gave him a rapid explanation of the state of affairs.

'Well, if I ever !' exclaimed the old man in reply ; 'and so the precious babe thinks he can be christened all in a minute, does he ? without so much as asking anyone's leave, or the least thing that never was. Well, here is an innocent sparrow for you, sir, and no mistake ! What's the world coming to ? We'll be having them coming and wanting to get married next. Don't cry like that, my little lad ! Just listen good and quiet while his reverence explains how we must know a bit about you before we get christening of you into the Holy Catholic Church. Did ever anyone hear tell of such a thing ! Why you may belong to quite another persuasion, for all we know ; and then wouldn't your mother be in a fine way !'

'The child says his mother is dead, by what I can make out,' observed the clergyman quietly.

'He will have a daddy then, I'll be bound,' replied the old sexton ; 'and who is to say that he is a Protestant, and wants his son——'

But Paul prevented the sentence being finished. 'No, I haven't,' he sobbed ; 'I have no daddy—I never had one.'

'Well, he must belong to *some one*,' said the sexton ; 'and by the look of him I should say to pretty decent folks too. I'll tell you what will be best to do, sir. Let us ask the little chap where he lives, and then as soon as your sister comes home from France we'll get her to look after him. There never was such a lady for "sparrows" as Mrs. Dunraven : and take my word for it, sir, this particular "sparrow" will be just to her mind.'

'Yes,' replied the clergyman, after a little reflection ; 'I don't see that we can do anything else. Mrs. Dunraven will be home the latter part of this week, and she will be able to act in this matter far better than myself. I am not at all skilled in the difficult task of adapting the Gospel to the intellect of babes. She is ; and she gets on so well with children too. I really don't see that we can do better than wait her return.'

So after a little difficulty they succeeded in finding out the name of the street where Paul said he lived ; and this

was written down in the clergyman's note-book. Then after repeated assurance that his request was only delayed, not denied, and that in a very few days he should, please God, be christened and have the holy sign of the 'cross' of a loving Redeemer marked with the water of baptism upon his brow, little Paul was suffered to depart. His tears were stayed; but he was not satisfied. His agitation had prevented his being as clear as he generally was at taking in explanations. Only dimly understanding that very soon a lady would call at his granny's house, and arrange everything for him as he wished, he went away with a very heavy heart. His eyes red, his cheeks stained, his bosom heaving with many a long-drawn sigh, he slowly made his way towards the court where Susie lived, intending to unburden his troubled breast to his dear little blind friend. He wanted sympathy; and she, he knew well, would have plenty to give him.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

'The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.'—PROVERBS xiv. 27.

PAUL had quite intended to have taken all his trouble to blind Susie; but somehow, as he walked along, the sunshine, the fresh morning air, the hum and stir of active life, and the thousand evidences of an awakened city, not only dried his eyes, but seemed to chase away the exact cause of his recent distress. He was still conscious of having experienced a great disappointment; but he could no longer have explained in what it consisted, except that it lay principally in the fact that Susie had been christened and that he had not. By the time he sat down by the blind child's little chair, his thoughts were occupied entirely with the church he had just left, and with the scene of the blessing of the little children depicted on the eastern window. If poor Susie had had the use of her eyes, she would have noticed the trace of recent tears on his face, and have wanted to know their cause; but in the darkness of her terrible affliction all she had power of remarking was that he was very quiet. But that was nothing

unusual. Paul was often very quiet ; so she took no notice of it ; but, after waiting patiently some little while for him to speak, she sought to arouse him by saying :

‘You are very late this morning, Paul. I’ve been expecting you quite a long time. Why didn’t you come before ?’

‘I couldn’t,’ replied Paul. ‘I’ve been very busy. I have been to church.’

‘To church !’ repeated Susie in surprise. ‘This is not the time to go to church. It is ever so much too early. Why, the doors wouldn’t be open.’

‘Yes, they were,’ said Paul. ‘I went inside, and oh ! Susie, it is beautiful !’

‘So mammy says,’ replied Susie ; ‘but I can’t see it, you know ; and though I think about it very often, I can’t exactly make out what *beautiful* means.’

‘*Beautiful* is nice,’ explained Paul. ‘You know what *nice* means, Susie ?’

‘Oh yes,’ cried Susie ; ‘of course I do ! Cakes are *nice*, and so is treacle-toffee.’

‘The church is not nice like cakes and toffee,’ replied Paul gravely. ‘It is quite another kind of *nice*. *Beautiful* means nice to look at. But dear, dear ! what is the use of trying to tell you ? Why, you don’t even know what *look* means ; and you never will, till you *can* look.’

‘Well, never mind, love,’ cried Susie, for his tone was rather fretful.

He had been about to tell her of all the beauties of colour and form that had so aroused his admiration in the church, and he had just remembered how completely he always failed when he tried to explain anything of that kind to the poor little girl. Alas ! bright crimson and sombre black, beauty and ugliness, grace and deformity, were all alike to her closed eyes. Talk of what he might, she could only rightly understand what she could feel ; and how few and trifling were the objects that he could bring in contact with her little fingers.

‘I was going to tell you about a beautiful picture, all colours, that I saw on a big window in the church,’ he said ; ‘but you don’t know what “beautiful” means, and you don’t know what “picture” means, and you don’t know what “colour” means ; so what is the use ?’

'Never mind,' said patient little Susie again. 'I know you don't like telling me about things I can't understand; so don't mind the church. Tell me, instead, what made you go to it, and so early too?'

'I wanted to be christened, like you,' he replied; 'so I went to the church to see about it.'

'But wasn't it too soon, dear? I don't think the minister would be there so early as this.'

'Yes, he was,' said Paul. 'I saw him.'

'And did he christen you, love?' asked Susie eagerly.

Paul shook his head.

'No; he wouldn't,' he replied with a long sigh. 'He says he can't. Some lady must do it.'

'Some lady!' repeated Susie. 'I think there must be a mistake, dear. Only *ministers* christen people. Ladies have nothing to do with it.'

'He said a great deal about a lady,' replied Paul; 'so she must have something to do with it. It is a lady who is coming home very soon. I was sorry. I wanted to be christened then. I didn't want to wait for any lady.'

'Well, never mind, Paul,' said Susie consolingly, for his tone was very sad; 'don't be sorry about it. *My* dear lady, Mrs. Dunraven, will be home in a few days now—Miss Ethel said so—and she will be certain to come and see me. Then I'll tell her how you want to be christened, and she will manage it for you as she did for me. Cheer up, dear! you will be christened very soon. You'll only have to wait a little while.'

'But I don't like waiting,' retorted Paul.

'Suppose we talk about something else,' suggested Susie, noticing the impatience of his tone. 'Tell me what you mean to do all the morning. Will you go to church again, with mammy and daddy and me?'

'No,' replied Paul; 'I won't.'

'I think you would like to hear all the people sing, dear,' continued Susie; 'and the minister prays so loud too, you would hear every word he says. I am sure you would like it.'

'No, I wouldn't,' cried Paul. 'I don't want to hear that minister say anything. He wouldn't christen me, and I don't like him.'



'Ministers are the great God's servants, you know, love,' observed Susie, with the shadow of a reproof in her tone. 'We ought to speak very respectfully of them, or God won't be pleased. And it is right to go to church, dear—very right indeed.'

'I don't care,' replied Paul; 'the minister wouldn't christen me, and I won't go to church again—never!'

'I wouldn't talk like that, Paul,' Susie now thought herself obliged to say. 'I don't think it is quite good; indeed, I am afraid it is bad, *very* bad.'

'Well, I don't care,' cried Paul again; 'if I don't want to like your minister, and go to church, I won't.'

'But it is so bad, dear, to say so,' still expostulated Susie.

'I don't care,' cried Paul, for the third time. 'I like to be bad sometimes; and when I want to be bad, I *will* be bad—if I like, I will.'

Susie was very shocked at this passionate outburst.

'Oh, Paul!' she exclaimed, quite in distress, 'you shouldn't be so naughty, dear; you shouldn't indeed.'

At another time the rebuke would have recalled him to his better self; but he was unusually ruffled this morning, and his only reply was a fretful:

'You are not at all kind to me, Susie. I think I shall go to granny.'

Instantly she was all contrition.

'I am so sorry, dear,' she said coaxingly; 'I didn't mean to, and I won't do it again. Don't leave me, Paul. Come close to me, love. I should so like to touch you and kiss you.'

But Paul was really cross.

'I don't want to be kissed,' he replied, 'and I *will* go home. You will be going to church soon, and I am going for a walk with my Charlie. Why, Susie!' He might well utter these words in a tone of dismay, for the little girl had put her pinafore to her sightless eyes and was sobbing bitterly. 'What is the matter?' cried Paul, kneeling before her and tugging at the pinafore. 'Have you hurt yourself, or have you a pain? Oh, dear Susie! what is the matter?'

But Susie threw her thin little arms round his neck and begged him not to be angry with her. 'She hadn't meant to vex him,' she said; 'and she couldn't bear it.'

'I'm not angry,' cried Paul, 'and not a bit vexed. What made you think I was? Oh, Susie! you can't be crying for that. I am sure you must be hurt, or ill. Shall I call your mammy?'

But she sobbed: 'No—there was really nothing the matter. Only she loved him very much, and couldn't bear him to be vexed.'

'I am sure I love you, too, Susie!' he replied poutingly; 'and I think *I'm* going to cry' (his voice was already trembling); 'I shall if you don't leave off soon—for I'm frightened.'

Then she wiped her tears away, and tried to smile; and he threw himself down by her side, and she put her arms round his neck, and so they sat and comforted each other.

'Where is Charlie going to take you for a walk?' inquired Susie presently, not so much from curiosity as from a desire to introduce a pleasant subject of conversation.

'I don't know,' replied Paul; 'p'raps to see the ships on the river, or p'raps to the park. But I will come and tell you all about it this afternoon.'

He was dimly conscious of having been impatient with his poor little friend, and he was anxious to make up for it. She thanked him very gratefully, and she rubbed his soft cheek with her little hand, and drew her fingers through his black curls, and felt very happy.

'Shall I tell you a story, love?' she asked presently, thinking to please him.

'No,' he replied. 'I don't want any stories to-day; but you may sing for me, Susie, if you like.'

'Very well, dear,' she cried, overjoyed at the permission. 'What shall I sing?'

"'Far away with Jesus,'" was his answer.

'Aren't you tired of that, dear?' she said gently. 'I have sung it for you so often. P'raps you would like something fresh this morning?'

'No I wouldn't,' he replied. 'I like that better than all your songs. Sing away, Susie.'

So Susie sang. Sweetly her young voice rose on the clear Sabbath air. Her father heard it in his chamber above, and turning to Bridget, asked with moistened eyes if their poor little crooked blind maid were not half an angel already.

The breeze carried it to a grey-haired drunkard dozing in his dirt and rags in a squalid chamber opposite ; and he groaned aloud as memory flew back to the days when he had been as innocent and young as the little singer. He thought that for him the words should be, ' Far away *from* Jesus,' and he tried to shut his ears to the ' Far away *with* Jesus,' for he felt that *that* could never be for him. A weary, overworked young mother heard it in the house next door, and it brought a sigh to her lips, and made her hold more tenderly the crying baby in her arms, and speak more gently to the three peevish little ones crowding at her knee. And lastly, Paul heard it, and it soothed his ruffled spirits, and drove away all his fretfulness, and made him once more the calm, patient little Paul he generally was. As the words fell one by one from Susie's lips, he thought of his angel mammy, and he joined his voice to hers, and sang out, ' Far away with Jesus,' looking up towards the bright sky as he did so, almost expecting to see the mother he had never known, waving him a joyful answer from the borders of the sweet home above.

Very happy were the two children sitting singing together ; but alas, that morning their happiness was fated to be short-lived. It was in this way. Susie was beginning the last verse of the hymn, when she was suddenly interrupted by Paul, who had just caught sight of a small figure at the bottom of the court, sauntering slowly towards them.

' Hush, Susie ! ' he whispered hastily. ' Here is Billy Blake. He is coming right to us ; and he does not look up to any good.'

No wonder Susie's heart sank. She knew Billy Blake of old. He was a fine well-made lad of about nine years of age ; consequently he was head and shoulders taller than Paul. But Billy was by no means a good boy. He was naturally mischievous and even cruel. Big and strong for his age, he delighted to show off his strength by bullying those smaller and weaker than himself. This was his way of having what he called ' a bit of fun ;'—unfortunately, Billy's idea of *fun* always meant pain, or annoyance to some one else. He lived some six or eight doors below Bridget's little home ; and for a long time he had been a terrible enemy to poor blind Susie. He thought it splendid fun to creep on tiptoe to her chair, snatch her up suddenly in his

strong arms, and run off with her to the end of the court, where he would put her down and laugh at her vain attempts to find her way back ; or he would stand before her with a stick in his hand, that he would keep poking into her face, annoying her very much, if not hurting her ; and the more she objected, the more he enjoyed what he called 'a fine game.'

Paul, however, had put a stop to all that. It was no fun to carry Susie away when Paul was there to lead her back again, or to go and call Bridget (if she happened to be anywhere near), or to say he would tell Susie's daddy, and get Billy well thrashed. Paul and Billy had had one or two unpleasant scuffles during the first week of Paul's intimacy with the blind child ; but after that a visit to a distant grandmother had taken Billy safely out of the way, much to the satisfaction of the two little friends. Now here he was back again. Susie began to tremble ; clutching Paul's jacket, she whispered :

'Keep quite still. Don't speak to him. Daddy is upstairs. We can shout out if he hurts us.'

No more was said. Billy, his grey eyes fixed mockingly upon Paul's dark ones, glaring defiance from Susie's lap, came leisurely up until he stood right before them ; then he stopped.

'How do you do ?' he said presently, taking off his cap and making them a low bow.

Susie pressed Paul's shoulder as a warning to make no answer.

'Ain't you very glad to see me ?' was Billy's next inquiry ; 'because if you're not, don't be afraid of hurting my feelings by saying so.'

Still no reply. Paul's black eyes never wavered an instant from the grey ones. He saw mischief in them, and was ready for it.

'Is this what you call neighbourly, now ?' continued Billy, after waiting in vain for some notice to be taken of him.

'Here I have been away for weeks, and you haven't so much as a "good-morning" to give me. Ain't you ashamed of yourselves ? P'r'aps you don't quite know who is talking to you, old blind eyes, so I'll excuse you' (this was to Susie) ; 'and as for you,' giving Paul's foot a knock as he spoke, 'I

guess your daddy forgot to pay for *manners* when he sent you to school, so it is not surprising you never learnt any.'

In spite of the repeated warning pressure of Susie's little hand, Paul could no longer keep his tongue still.

'I have never been to school,' he cried, in answer to Billy's last remark. 'And I never had a daddy, neither.'

Unfortunate speech! Billy took it up directly. He laughed; he roared, he pointed straight at him.

'There's a fellow!' he cried. 'Oh my!—there's a fellow! Never had a daddy! Why, he ought to be put in a twopenny show!'

'No I oughtn't!' exclaimed Paul, flushed and angry. He was not used to be laughed at, and he did not like it; besides, the sounds of Billy's noisy merriment had brought three or four little urchins out of the neighbouring houses, and these were now looking on with amusement, and soon took up the cry:

'Put him in a twopenny show! There's a fellow!'

'Why ought I to be put in a twopenny show?' continued Paul indignantly. 'I don't want a daddy; why should I?'

But Billy laughed louder than ever; so did the others; though none of them knew what they were laughing at. The cry (that meant so little, but that conveyed so much to Paul's outraged feelings), 'There's a fellow!' rose louder and louder in proportion as he grew more and more angry, until at last he was beside himself with rage.

'I don't know what you're laughing at,' he stammered between his clenched teeth, when he could at last make himself heard.

'Oh, don't you, indeed,' replied Billy; 'then I'll be kind and tell you. Come, lads, give three cheers for the boy who never had a daddy, and doesn't want one. Now then—Hip—hip—hurrah!'

All joined in lustily, though far more from a love of making a noise than from any unfriendliness towards Paul. He stood in the midst of the uproarious group, red and furious. When the cheers began to die away, he stamped on the ground and cried:

'I don't care! you silly, silly things! I've got a granny, and a Charlie, and a mammy too! What do I want with a daddy?'

But the epithet *silly* offended little Jack Foster, barefooted, jacketless, and aged seven.

'Silly yourself,' he replied sharply. 'I know I should feel uncommon silly if I had no daddy.'

'So would any lad but a stupid like him!' ejaculated Billy scornfully.

'Grannies are all very well in their way,' was the calm observation of Robbie Noland, aged eight, 'but I think a fellow ought to have a daddy as well.'

Paul was beginning to think so too. All these boys had daddies. He had seen and spoken to them all. Even poor little blind crooked Susie had a daddy. He was wondering, as he had often wondered lately, why he had not one as well. He was wishing, what he had never wished until this unlucky morning, that he had one. He was feeling aggrieved that he could not silence their provoking remarks, by exclaiming defiantly and truthfully, 'I have a finer daddy than any of you!' Alas! no such assertion could come from his lips, and a mountain of misery seemed to fall upon him as he was obliged to confess that his young tormentors had certainly right on their side.

'Any fellow can have a granny,' now sang out little Mike Donovan. 'I've got two.'

'So have I,' put in Billy. 'I've had three; but one died, and then my grandfather got me another.'

'Well, none of you have got a Charlie, anyhow,' cried Paul triumphantly, as the bright thought came into his head.

Poor little Paul! his triumph was shortlived.

'Who wants a Charlie?' indignantly demanded Jack Foster. 'Why, my daddy could swallow your Charlie, he could!'

'My daddy could put your Charlie in his pocket, and not know he was there either,' asserted Billy.

'My daddy has got the loveliest whiskers that ever was!' remarked Robbie. 'I guess your Charlie can't show anything like them.'

'His Charlie is just nothing at all,' cried Mike. 'I've seen him, and he is not a bit bigger than my brother Tom.'

'I have got the finest daddy in the court, I have,' declared Jack Foster; 'mammy says so. I wouldn't have a Charlie if I were offered them by dozens.'

smack? You see I am very strong, though I'm rather little.'

'I wasn't crying for myself,' replied Susie, wiping the tears from her poor useless eyes; 'I was frightened for you. Billy is dreadfully strong, and I don't believe he minds what he does when he is in a rage. I was afraid he would kill you; that is why I screamed for dad.'

'You have got a splendid dad,' observed Paul, with a long sigh.

'Yes, dear,' said Susie, understanding the sigh; 'and I'll lend him to you whenever you want him.'

'But I would rather have one of my own,' said Paul, feeling very miserable.

'You've got a granny, love, and a Charlie, and a mammy in heaven, and me. Isn't that a great deal?' suggested little peace-making Susie.

'P'raps it is,' replied Paul with another sigh; 'but I should like to have a daddy too. I believe Robbie Noland was right. A fellow *ought* to have a daddy.'

'I don't think Robbie knows anything about it, love; nor Mike, nor Jack neither,' observed Susie consolingly.

Paul shook his head.

'I am afraid they do,' he said sorrowfully. 'I am afraid a fellow—a *proper* fellow—ought to have a daddy like Jack Foster's—very big and strong, you know, with lovely whiskers.'

'Perhaps Charlie will get whiskers some day, dear,' suggested Susie; 'when he gets a bit older and taller.'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'he will; for he says they are coming fast. But a daddy would have them all ready made—a *real* daddy would.'

Bridget came out of the house just then to tell Susie it was time to get ready for church, and that she must come in.

'You will come this afternoon and tell me where you have been for a walk, won't you, Paul?' asked Susie, as she got up from her little chair.

'Yes,' said Paul, 'I'll come.'

But there was something in his voice so forlorn and unhappy, that Susie's tender heart was touched. Putting her arms round his neck, she kissed him warmly and whispered:

'There isn't a finer lad going than you, Paul, though you

haven't a daddy. If you had half a dozen you couldn't be more splendid, love ; so don't fret.'

But Paul *did* fret. As he walked home, he conned over in his mind all that had taken place. He repeated to himself again and again the various remarks of the little fellows who had found such pleasure in tormenting him ; and his heart swelled with bitterness as he confessed that they had a great advantage over him. They had all daddies. Oh, how degraded he felt in their midst that he had none ! The spoiling and petting that he had received from babyhood, if it had had no ill effects upon his character, had certainly taught him to have a very good opinion of himself—a very fair idea of his own importance. And now to be told that he was 'no kind of a fellow'—that he ought to be called 'pretty Polly' all his days!—and all because he had no daddy ! Oh, dreadful ! He was crimson, not with anger this time, but with mortification ; and the tears that were making his brown eyes sparkle were tears of shame.

Suddenly his bitter thoughts were scattered to the winds by a violent box on the ears, that made sparks fly before his eyes, and sent him tumbling into the middle of the road. Before he had time to see where it came from, he was picked up again, and shaken, and knocked, and cuffed, till he screamed with pain. Alas ! Billy Blake had been lying in wait for him, determined to have ample revenge for that smack on his cheek.

Things were going very badly with Paul. He was already very much hurt, and in another few moments he might have been seriously so ; for, as Susie had surmised, Billy did not care what he did when he was in a rage. He was in a terrible rage now. Paul might well scream. But an unexpected friend was near. He had been passing through a narrow street, taking a short cut to his home, when Billy attacked him. This street was lined at each side with small squalid houses, the dwelling-places of some of the very poor of that large city. In the front room of the house before which the unequal contest was taking place, a man was sleeping ; a man footsore and weary, whose rags were stained with the soil of many a day's travel, and upon whose rugged face were the lines of many a day's suffering and care. Paul's screams aroused him from his sleep, or rather



from his doze, and rising from the heap of straw upon which he had found a bed, he took a hasty stride to the window. No sooner did he see what was going on than he hurried into the street. One hand seized Billy's collar, the other tore Paul from his grasp; and holding the boys thus at arm's length from each other, he cried:

'You miserable young coward! What do you mean by setting on a babe half your size, eh?'

The question was addressed to Billy, and was accompanied by a rough shake. Billy looked up amazed. The man who was holding him in such a firm clutch was tall and powerful. An angry frown, a profusion of black beard and unkempt hair, gave him a most ferocious appearance. Billy began to tremble.

'Let me go,' he said sulkily; 'it isn't any affair of yours. I've done nothing to you. Let me go!'

'I'll let you go,' said the man; 'but I'll teach you first to hit fellows your own size. You young coward! You were on the way to kill this little one, if I hadn't come out. Look there what you've done.'

So saying he brought Billy face to face with Paul, who was presenting a woeful appearance. His clothes dusty and torn, his face bruised, and his nose bleeding, he had indeed been pretty well knocked about. Billy began to think that he had gone too far, and to wish he were safely out of the hands of this angry-looking stranger. He began to whimper.

'You just let me go, now,' he whined. 'I've done nothing to you. What did he hit me for, a bit since? He gave me a smack that nearly knocked my cheek off; and all 'cause I laughed at him through his saying he'd got no daddy like the rest of us.'

Billy received another shake, as the man replied:

'Got no daddy, hasn't he? It is a good thing for you he hasn't. Do you call that a laughing matter, eh? It would have served you right if he *had* knocked your cheek off! He was a brave little chap to try. Striking a blow for his dead dad! It is more than you'd do, I take it.'

As each word was accompanied by a shake that seemed likely to loosen all Billy's teeth, that young gentleman began to entertain grave fears for his safety.

'His dad isn't dead!' he cried deprecatingly. 'I wouldn't

laugh at a fellow who said his dad was dead ; but *he* said he never had a dad—that is what I was laughing at !

‘And from laughing at him, you got to fighting, eh ?’ was the stranger’s reply ; ‘though he doesn’t come up to your shoulder. You’re a pretty kind of a brave lad, you are ! No, you may wriggle and kick as you like, you don’t get away from me. We’ll see how *you* like fighting with some one double your size.’

Billy began to roar.

‘Come, stop that noise,’ cried the man ; ‘you don’t raise the street while I’ve got you. Do you hear !’ (shake, shake). ‘Are you going to stop ?’

Billy did indeed stop ; oddly confused as to whether he was standing upon his feet or his head, white and trembling, he expected nothing less than to be shaken to death. Paul was very nearly as terrified, but the voice that now addressed him, though rough, was not unkind :

‘Where do you live ?’ it asked.

He replied, as well as he could : ‘Down a certain street, and up another.’

‘You’ve no need to look scared,’ said the man. ‘Look here, can you run home in five minutes ?’

Paul replied that he could.

‘Then, I will hold this brave chap,’ continued the man, giving Billy another shake as he spoke, ‘just five minutes ; unless he tempts me to make a meal of him before. I’m hungry enough to do it ; and if he don’t stop wriggling and shouting, I won’t answer for myself. Do you hear that ? Stand still !’

Billy *did* hear it, and he *did* stand still, being far too terrified to do anything else.

‘Ah,’ said the man, ‘I thought you’d find out who is master. Now, little one, I’ll hold him, as I told you, just five minutes. That will give you time to get safe home ; and keep out of his way for the future. There, go along.’

So saying, he raised his hand from Paul’s collar, and away the child fled. His tears, that had been stayed during the past few moments, broke forth again as he neared his home. Charlie and Mrs. Vogan were indeed alarmed when they saw him bearing such strong marks of having been badly used. The former caught him in his arms, and

searched anxiously to see if his injuries were serious. His mind being set at ease upon that point, he asked who had been hurting him. Then he handed him over to his granny, and set off to look for Billy Blake. When he found him, he stated pretty plainly all he would do if he ever heard of him laying a finger upon his Paul again; and he looked so terribly in earnest with his flashing eyes and indignant face, that Billy considered himself fortunate when he finally got off with a single smart box on the ear.

When Charlie returned home, he found Paul already recovered so far as his hurts went. The stains were washed from his face, the dust brushed from his clothes, and he was pouring a pitiful tale into Mrs. Vogan's sympathizing ears, of how he had been laughed at and 'made such fun of,' because he had never had a daddy like all the other lads. Charlie's brow contracted with an angry frown.

'Making fun of you, eh? 'cause you never had a daddy?' he cried. 'Well, you can just tell them from me, that there isn't a fellow among them has got the daddy *you* have! No daddy, indeed! Well, I never! Why, there isn't one of their daddies fit to walk by the side of yours! You tell them *that*, next time they get laughing at you.'

Paul could hardly believe his ears; his heart began to beat with a great sudden joy; his eyes, still red with his recent tears, opened to their widest extent; his voice actually trembled with emotion as, drawing close to Charlie, he gasped:

'Oh, Charlie! *is that true?*'

'True? Of course it is true!' cried Charlie.

'But—but,—Charlie, you don't mean—you—you—oh, you *never* can mean, that *I've got a daddy?*'

'That is just what I do mean,' said Charlie. 'Of course you've a daddy!—a splendid daddy!'

'But—but, Charlie, is he alive? He isn't in heaven, too; is he, Charlie? Oh, I hope not! *Do* tell me that *he* didn't go to heaven! Oh, *do*, Charlie!'

Paul was so agitated that he could hardly speak; and Charlie, after a little hesitation, fearing to distress him, replied:

'For all I know, he may be alive; anyhow, I never heard for certain that he was dead' (which was very true).

This quite satisfied Paul.

'Is he very big?' he cried, with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes.

'Yes, love.'

'And strong?'

'Yes, love; very big and very strong.'

'But—but—not as big and strong as Robbie Noland's daddy? Oh, he *can't* be as big and strong as *him*?'

'He is a deal bigger,' replied Charlie; 'in fact one doesn't often see a bigger man than your dad—so your poor mammy used to tell me. If you don't make haste and grow, I shall begin to think you are going to take after her. She was a bit small—and *so* pretty.'

'Never mind her,' cried Paul, in an ecstasy of delight. 'She is in heaven, and can't come to me. Tell me about my daddy, Charlie. Has he lovely whiskers?'

'Splendid ones!—so your mammy said,' replied Charlie.

For a few seconds Paul was speechless with the excess of his joy. His most ambitious dream was realized; not only could he never be jeered at again, as he had been that morning, but he could triumph over all his young tormentors. *His* daddy was finer than any of theirs! What would Mike, and Jack, and Robbie say to that? He clapped his little hands together, and jumped about the room crying:

'Oh, my *dear, dear* daddy! I am so glad! I don't know what I'm doing, I'm so glad! When shall I see him, Charlie? Oh, I do want to see him so much!'

Charlie's countenance fell. He began to think that he had made a mistake. He tried to put the child off, first in one way, and then in another; but it was all in vain. The amount of affection that Paul had all ready to give to his unknown father was something wonderful. Standing between Charlie's knees, his cheeks rosy and his big eyes sparkling with happiness, he asked question after question concerning him.

'Wasn't he just splendid? Wasn't he very good? Where did he live? Would Charlie take him (Paul) to see him? Would he take him soon—*very* soon? That night? Well, the next day, then? Well, as soon as he could, anyhow? He *ought* to go and see his daddy—his *dear* daddy! What was the good of his having a daddy, if he were never to see him? And why *couldn't* he go and see him,' etc.

Charlie had to invent and invent. He knew Paul of old. He must have a sensible reasonable answer to his questions. A tale must be carefully framed indeed to withstand the searching test of his: 'But why did it? But how could it? But what was it all for?' etc. And Charlie knew also his sensitive tender little heart too well to distress him with the sad truth that his poor father had shared his mother's fate, and found an untimely grave beneath the bosom of the dark waters.

'I wouldn't have done that, if I'd been you, Charlie love,' observed Mrs. Vogan gravely, when Paul, satisfied at last, had gone upstairs to put on his shoes and stockings before setting out with Charlie for the promised walk. 'What is the use of filling the child's head with tales of a father he will never see?'

'I didn't mean to,' replied Charlie, 'but he leads one on so from one thing to another. Never mind; we'll say no more, and he will soon forget it.'

'I don't know that,' said Mrs. Vogan. 'Paul doesn't forget easy. I never met his equal for thinking; and I'm afraid he will never be done thinking about this daddy of his.'

She was right. Paul could think of nothing else, and talk of nothing else. He and Charlie strolled together to one of the parks, and the latter tried his hardest to engage his little companion's attention, first with this, and then with that. It was of no use. Paul would be interested in nothing beyond what concerned his newly-found father. 'When shall I see him?' was his repeated cry; nor was it silenced until Charlie had at last reluctantly allowed: 'That though he didn't exactly know where Paul's father was, he expected he was somewhere about; p'r'aps not *very* far off. That though he didn't *quite* know what had kept him away so long, he really thought it was getting time for him to be coming home. And that—well, yes—he *might*—oh yes, of course—he *certainly might turn up any day*.' (Charlie bit his lip with vexation as Paul literally dragged this admission from him.) 'Would he be glad to see his Paul? Of course he would! Wouldn't they have fine times when they were all together? Of course they would! Wouldn't Charlie be right glad to see him—and granny too? Of course they

would ! Didn't Charlie hope that he would come home that week ? Well, yes—oh yes !—of course he did ! Would it be of any use to go and look for him ? Well, no—Charlie did not think it would. The City was such a big place. They might walk miles and miles and not meet him after all.'

So Paul prattled and prattled ; until at last, by force of talking and hoping, he came in a short time to persuade himself that his 'dear daddy' might make his appearance any minute at their door.

'Let us go home,' he said eagerly, when they had hardly been in the park a quarter of an hour ; 'he may be waiting for us ;' and he was quite disappointed when on their return they found old Mrs. Vogan still all alone in the little kitchen.

'We shall just have to humour him in the fancy till he forgets it,' observed Charlie, as he explained to the old woman how matters stood. 'It will do him no harm to be on the watch for his daddy for a day or two. He will soon get tired of waiting, and forget all about him.'

Mrs. Vogan shook her head.

'Our little Paul is such a queer lad,' she replied. 'He never forgets what he sets his mind on, as he has set it now on this dad of his. Eh ! but I do wish you hadn't mentioned the fellow to him. My mind misgives me that mischief will come of it. What evil fate set the boys making fun of him to-day on such a matter, I can't make out !'

'What mischief *can* come of it?' cried Charlie hastily.

The old woman shook her head once more.

'I feel mighty uneasy-like,' she said. 'I wish you'd tell him the truth about his father.'

'I will, by degrees,' he said. 'If I did it all at once he'd fret himself sick ; and that would never do. I can't bear to see him cry.'

Mrs. Vogan was about to make some reply, when Paul interrupted her by announcing that he would go off there and then and tell Susie all about his 'dear dad.' With a little difficulty, he was persuaded to sit down quietly and get his dinner ; Charlie promising that he should go the moment he had eaten it.

## CHAPTER XIV.

‘So all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.’—JOB xxxiii. 29, 30.

PAUL was indeed terribly impatient to tell his wonderful news to his little blind friend. He could hardly sit still while he ate a small share of the simple little dinner that Mrs. Vogan had prepared while he and Charlie had been taking their walk ; and as soon as ever he could, he ran out of the house, quite intending not to stop running until he found himself by Susie’s side. But in turning the corner of the street where Billy had punished him so severely only a few hours before, he caught sight of the man who had proved so timely a deliverer, sitting upon a doorstep ; and although he was in such a hurry, he had a kind of feeling that it would be very ungrateful to pass by without stopping to thank him for his kindness. So he went up and stood before him. The man did not see him, for he was sitting with his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands.

Paul noticed that he was a very big, strong-looking man, and he had instantly a profound respect for him. Stature and strength were his chief ideas of manliness. But he also remarked that he was dirty, and clothed in nothing but rags ; and this he did not like at all, for he was not accustomed to it. Indeed, the disreputable appearance of this friend of the morning would have frightened him away, if his feelings of gratitude had not been so strong ; as it was, he bravely stood his ground, and after vainly waiting some few seconds for the man to take his hands from his face and notice him, he announced his presence by crying :

‘Halloo !’

The man looked up with a start.

‘Halloo !’ he said in reply.

‘Were you asleep ?’ asked Paul.

‘Well, I don’t know ; p’raps I was. Who are you ?’

‘Don’t you know me ?’ replied Paul. ‘Why, you stopped Billy Blake beating me only a while since. I knew you in a minute, and I came to tell you that I’m very much obliged.’

'Oh, you are the little fellow, are you?' said the man.  
'No, I didn't know you. Did Billy hurt you?'

'Yes,' replied Paul; 'but I'm better now. What are you looking at?'

Paul asked this question in some alarm, for the man had put his hands on his shoulders and drawn him between his knees, and he was now looking steadily into his face. He did not like to have those dirty hands on his 'Sunday jacket,' nor to be so near such a tattered coat, nor yet to have that unwashed, unshaved face peering so curiously into his own. The man made no immediate reply, nor did he appear to notice the child's uneasiness. He was gazing right into his big brown eyes, a puzzled eager look upon his face, and Paul had to ask him twice what he was looking at before he succeeded in getting an answer. And when the answer came it was a strange one. It was nothing but a deep sigh; but Paul felt it, as he felt every sign of distress, and he forgot his disinclination to stand so near the rags, and cried:

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' replied the man. 'What should be the matter?'

'I don't know,' said Paul; 'but I heard you sigh, and I thought you were p'raps sorry about something.'

'Ay,' cried the man, drawing his hand wearily across his forehead, 'most of the folks in this world are sorry about *something*; and some few of them are sorry about *everything*. Maybe I'm one of those few. That's where it is, you see. But cheer up, youngster! there'll be time enough for you to have that serious look on your face when you begin to understand what it's all about, which won't be for many a year.'

Paul was looking very grave. He was dimly conscious that there was something wrong with this poor man who had defended him so kindly from Billy's fury, and he felt quite distressed.

'Never you mind,' he said; 'you be happy, and don't mind nothing.' He felt that this was all he had to say in the way of consolation.

The man laughed.

'You're a funny little chap,' he said. 'I didn't know youngsters were like you; but then I know nothing about



them. So I'm not to mind, eh, my boy? Well, not bad advice either. One-half the troubles in this life come through folks "*mindin*g," as you put it. You don't know what I'm talking about, do you? No more do I.'

'I only thought you did not look very happy,' ventured Paul, as the other paused. He was a little confused as to what all this meant, but he felt he must say something.

'Happy!' cried the man. 'Ah, me and that word parted company years ago. Happy! Well, I'm as happy as ever I expect to be; and that is saying a great deal, for at the present moment I don't complain of anything, unless it be a bit of hunger. You understand *that*, don't you, youngster? I'm hungry; that is all that's the matter with me.'

Paul *did* understand that. This poor kind man was very hungry. No wonder he did not look happy. Who could look happy when they were hungry?

'You just wait,' he said, with a knowing nod of his black curly head, and the next instant he was scampering back towards his home as hard as he could. 'Granny,' he cried, as he rushed all breathless in at the door, 'I want some more meat, and some more cabbage, and some more apple-dumpling.' That had been their dinner.

'Why, didn't you get enough, love?' she asked.

'Oh yes, granny; it isn't for me! It is to give to a poor man who is very hungry.'

'Then he'll have to be hungrier, dearie, for all we can do for him,' replied the old woman. 'I am keeping the bits that were left from dinner for Charlie. You wouldn't be giving his supper away, would you?'

No, indeed, Paul would not; but he must have something for this hungry friend of his. Looking round to see what he could take, his eyes caught sight of a loaf on the shelf.

'Give me that, granny,' he cried.

'What, the loaf, love! Why, what's coming to the lad? It is hard to be wanting, Paul, I know; but, dearie, *we're* not the ones the hungry should come to. They must go to the rich, not to poor folk like us.'

'Not *this* hungry one,' cried Paul. 'He ought to come to us, because he has been so kind to me.' And he went on to explain how it was this good stranger who had rescued him from Billy's wrath, saying in conclusion: 'Give me the loaf,

granny. He is a very big man. I'm sure he'll eat every bit of it, for he is dreadfully hungry.'

Mrs. Vogan took the loaf down from the shelf, and placed it in Paul's hands, saying :

'I never did such a thing in all my life, as give away a six-penny loaf that hadn't had so much as the knife stuck into it ; but if the poor fellow has been so good to you, we ought not to leave him hungry. It is hard for a big man—as you say he is—to be without a meal on a Sabbath day ; and I'm thinking the reason of it will be no credit to him. But that is no business of ours, love. He's done you a good turn, and it is only fair that you should do one for him ; so take him the bread, dearie, and welcome.'

The man's amazement when Paul once more stood before him and offered him the loaf, was so great that it quite deprived him of speech. When he at last found his voice he cried : 'Where did you get it from ?'

'From my granny,' replied Paul. 'You told me you were hungry, so I ran home to get it for you. Won't you take it ?'

The man's reply was another wondering stare into Paul's brown eyes, and he stared until his own eyes grew dim and he could see no longer. Then with his coarse hand he sought to clear his vision, and observing that the said hand was in consequence wet, he laughed, a low, awkward laugh ; then his lip quivered just a trifle ; then he cleared his throat two or three times, and with another laugh, and something very like a blush, he said :

'Well, if this isn't the queerest thing that ever happened to me yet ! Why, I thought you had run off to your play, and here you've been begging me a meal.'

'You said you were very hungry, you know,' replied Paul apologetically—he was not quite certain whether he had done right or not ; 'and granny could only spare you dry bread. She wants what was left from dinner for Charlie's supper.'

'What do they call you ?' was all the man could find to say after another long look into the little face before him.

'Paul.'

'Paul !' repeated the man. '*Paul !* That is a strange name to give to a little chap like you ! What made them call you Paul ?'

'I don't know,' said the child; 'but they did.'

'Paul what?'

'Nothing but Paul.'

'But you must have some other name,' persisted the man. 'What did your daddy call himself? Ah! but I forgot. You never had a daddy.'

Paul's little face had often flushed and his eyes had often sparkled, but never with such pride and joy as now, when he cried triumphantly:

'Yes, but I had, though! And what's more, I've got a daddy now—a splendid daddy! And he is coming home soon, too—*very* soon—p'raps to-day! Then won't I show him up to all the lads who've been making game of me!'

The man had by this time taken the loaf from Paul's outstretched arms, and he had broken a piece from it which he was now devouring with an eagerness that showed how much it was needed. But Paul was too excited to notice that. Rubbing his little hands together, he poured forth all his joy, and pride, and hopes in his newly-found parent. Very incoherently he expressed himself; but the man never interrupted him. He only watched him curiously as he munched the bread, and it was not until Paul brought his tale to a close, and stated his intention of running off to Susie, that he spoke: then it was to say:

'Don't go away yet. Tell me some more.'

'There is no more to tell,' said Paul; 'and Susie will be wanting me. Won't she be glad to hear I've got such a splendid daddy! And won't Billy stare! and Jack, and Robbie, and all of them!'

He was again about to say good-bye, but again the man prevented him.

'Here, stop a bit,' he said; 'we must shake hands before you go.'

But when he got the mite of a hand in his great coarse one he seemed unwilling to part with it. He felt all the small fingers separately, and laughed as he compared them with his own.

'You're a very little chap,' he said presently, more from feeling himself called upon to say something than from a desire to make any remarks upon Paul's stature.

'I am a great deal bigger than Susie, anyhow,' replied Paul.

'Who is Susie—your sister?'

'No, I haven't got a sister. Susie is just a girl I play with.'

'Have you a brother?'

'No,' replied Paul, shaking his little head; 'I have only a granny and a Charlie.'

'Who is Charlie?'

Paul found the question a little difficult to answer. After a good deal of hesitation all he replied was:

'I don't know who he is—except that he is Charlie. I don't think he is anybody else.'

'Is he a lad?'

'Oh no; he is big—very big.'

'He is a man then?'

'Well, very nearly,' replied Paul, after a little consideration. 'He is big enough to be a man, but he has got no whiskers yet; at least none worth speaking of.'

'Ah,' said the man, speaking more to himself than to the boy, 'Charlie will be some young lodger of the granny's, I suppose. So, my little Paul,' he continued aloud, 'you have no brother, and no sister, and no mammy, and a daddy that you know nothing at all about. You *are* badly off!'

'Oh yes, I *have* a mammy,' cried Paul eagerly, 'but she went to heaven when I was a baby. I am very sorry she did; but I suppose it couldn't be helped. I shall be very glad when my daddy comes home, because I find the lads about here think nothing of a fellow unless he's got a daddy; so I am rather badly off—till he comes, I mean.'

'I guess he would come quick enough,' replied the man, 'if he knew how he was wanted. What made you care whether I was hungry or not, eh? you funny bit of a chap with your brown eyes sparkling like two glow-worms. Heigho! and here I haven't so much as a sixpence for you. Never mind! You be about here some time in the morning, and I'll give you the biggest sixpence you ever saw in all your young life.'

'Will you?' cried Paul; 'but will you be able to spare it?'

He looked upon sixpence as quite a fortune, and there could be no doubt but that this man was very poor.

'Oh yes,' was the reply; 'I am not always so badly off as I am at this moment. You shall have your sixpence, old fellow! I shall have a bit of money by this time to-morrow.'

'Where will you get it from?' asked Paul.

The other laughed. 'You are determined to know all about it,' he cried. 'Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't; so I'll tell you, and welcome. There's a trifle owing to me in the shape of a pound or two for work done a few years ago; that's all, my little man. I can't get it to-day, as it's the Sabbath; but to-morrow a walk into the City will soon line my pocket.'

'Are you going to walk into the City?' asked Paul eagerly, this being all he could understand of this last speech.

'Well, supposing I am—what then?'

'But are you going to-night?' he cried.

'For the sake of argument, we will say I am,' was the reply; 'but what has that to do with you, eh?'

'Why,' said Paul, 'if you are going to walk into the City to-night you are pretty certain to meet my dad. If you do, will you tell him to come home as quick as he can?'

'Then you think he is somewhere about the City, do you?'

'Yes,' replied Paul; 'if he may come home to-night, or to-morrow (and Charlie said he might), he must be somewhere near. You keep a sharp look-out for him, and tell him that Paul wants him.'

'Paul wants him!' repeated the man. 'Then he knows you, does he?'

'Of course he does,' cried Paul. 'What would be the good of having a daddy if he didn't know me? You tell him that Paul wants him very bad. Tell him how Billy and all of them have been making fun of me; and say I want to show him up to them, and let them see what a splendid dad I've got. He will come quick, if you tell him that.'

'You trust to me,' replied the man good-naturedly, wishing to humour the child and not to damp so much hope and brightness; 'I'll keep my eyes open, and the moment I see him I'll tell him all about it, and send him home.'

'Oh, that *is* kind,' cried Paul joyfully. 'I am so glad! I must go and tell Susie. Thank you *so* much. But please let me go.'

The man was still holding his little hands.

'Very well, then; you shall go,' he now said, feeling he could detain him no longer; 'but you remember your sixpence

and be about here to-morrow morning ; and recollect that we part friends. There, good-bye.'

Paul ran merrily up the street, only pausing at the end to wave his hand to his new friend, who was still sitting upon the doorstep, eating the loaf. Then he lost no time in running to Susie. Oh, he had so much to tell her !

It was some time, indeed, before she could gather from his laughing, triumphant story the real facts of his news. When she did so her joy was almost as great as his.

'But do you really think your dad will come home soon—this week?' she asked ; for it seemed far too good to be true.

And Paul replied, without the least hesitation : 'Oh yes !' and then he went on to tell her of the kind stranger who had saved him from Billy's angry hands that morning, and who was going to walk into the City that very night, and be on the look-out for his dad, and send him straight home. Susie had a good deal of indignation to express upon Billy's conduct, and great sympathy to give to Paul, and many praises to pour forth in favour of the poor hungry man who had proved so good a friend, before she could again give her attention to the matter in hand. In the course of their conversation she observed :

'Isn't it a bit queer, Paul, that this daddy of yours has been away so long? You have never seen him—not *once*, have you, dear ?'

'No,' replied Paul ; 'not once. That is why I am so anxious to see him now. I want to know if he is really finer than all the other fellows' daddies. Charlie says he is.'

'It is very queer, all the same,' continued Susie thoughtfully. 'You are getting a big boy, dear. You turned six years of age some months ago. That is very old.'

'Yes,' said Paul ; 'it is rather old.'

'Too old not to have seen one's daddy *once*,' continued Susie.

Paul made no reply ; but he thought all the more. What could have kept his dad away all those years? This was a question he could not answer. Indeed, it was too perplexing to think about ; so he soon dismissed it from his mind. He was certainly very much disappointed when on acquainting Bridget and Tom with his good news he observed a look almost of dismay on their honest faces. Then Tom grew

very very grave, and Bridget actually turned white as, clasping her hands, she cried :

‘The good Lord in His mercy grant it. But how can it be? Why, it would be nothing short of a miracle!’

‘What would be a miracle?’ asked Susie and Paul together.

But Bridget, obeying a whispered ‘Hush!’ from Tom, made no answer; only she called Paul to her side and questioned him closely as to his coming dad. Paul told her willingly all he knew. But this evidently did not satisfy her; for when she at last sent him back to Susie she put on her bonnet and shawl and said to her husband: ‘I’ll just run down to Charlie and hear the rights of all this.’

Paul heard the remark, but it did not trouble him.

‘She has gone to hear all about it from Charlie,’ he said to the blind child, as he watched her walk quickly down the court. ‘That is quite right. He will tell her ever so much better than me.’

Very pleasantly he and Susie chatted together about the happy days in store for him for another half hour, when, alas! Billy Blake sauntered up to them, and their enjoyment was over. Billy’s wrath was still smouldering. His revenge for the smack on his cheek was by no means satisfied; but he dare not attack Paul again. He felt it would not be safe. He had too many friends. But blows are not the only weapons of spite and anger. An unkind, unfeeling tongue can sting as sharply as any hand. No one knew this better than Billy; and he had found out where he could best sting Paul, and he had made up his mind to do so whenever he had an opportunity. He had one this afternoon. Leaning his back against the wall, and continuing to whittle a stick he held in his hands, he began a long string of taunting observations that roused the poor little fellow almost to frenzy.

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘a pretty fellow *you* are! A granny’s lad! That’s all you are. Come on, Robbie! here, Mike! come and look at a granny’s boy! You won’t see one every day. Come and look at the fellow that hasn’t got a daddy and yet calls himself a lad!’

It was in vain that both Paul and Susie loudly persisted that a daddy was soon coming for Paul who would put all

other daddies in the shade by reason of his wonderful height and strength—yes, and his lovely whiskers, too! This was only adding fuel to the fire, for each of the little boys who had gathered round instantly took up arms to defend his particular father from any such aspiring rival as the one described by Paul. Then Billy began again :

‘Oh, it was very fine of him to turn round and say that now!’ he cried; ‘but did he think they were going to believe him? Did they look as if they could be taken in by any such story? Not they, indeed! If he had a daddy, why didn’t he show him up, eh? Where did he keep him, eh? P’raps he thought he was too fine to be about in a general way, and had him locked up somewhere. They would be glad to see him when he let him out.’

Then they all laughed aloud, and danced about, and took up the cry: ‘Who’d be a granny’s boy!’ until Paul began to sob with exasperation. Susie’s blue eyes were moist too, but Tom was out of hearing, and all she could do was to throw her arms round Paul and hold him tightly, and whisper, with heaving bosom, ‘That they were silly bad boys, and he mustn’t mind them.’

A terrible time they both had of it; but it came to an end at last. The little persecutors grew weary, and ran off to seek some fresh amusement, and they were once more left alone. But, alas! all their brightness was gone.

‘I shall never be happy again,’ said Paul, wiping the tears from his eyes. ‘I shall never be happy again until my daddy turns up. And if he doesn’t—oh, Susie, if he doesn’t!—I think I shall break my heart!’

Susie was greatly distressed, for Paul’s tone was terribly in earnest. She paused for a moment or two, anxiously considering what comfort she could best offer him; and then, feeling that this unfortunate case was altogether beyond her consolation, she flew to her usual remedy of changing the conversation.

‘Please tell me what you saw in the park, love, this morning?’ she asked, by way of doing this.

With a long sigh Paul dismissed his troubles for the present, and replied:

‘Trees, and grass, and daisies.’

‘Did you bring me any, dear?’



'No,' he said, 'I never thought of it. I was so busy thinking of my dad, you see' (another sigh).

'I wish you had, love,' continued Susie hastily; for she had heard the sigh, and was afraid of a return to the painful subject. 'I have heard a great deal of all three, but I never saw any.'

'Why, you *can't* see!' cried Paul.

'I mean, I never *felt* any,' she replied.

Paul thought over the matter for a few moments, and then he said:

'I could not bring you a tree, because they are very big—oh, very big indeed! I might have brought you a bit of one, though: a small branch, or a few leaves; but they would have been of very little use. If you had felt them for twenty years, they wouldn't have taught you what a tree is.'

'I think, they would, dear,' she ventured.

'No, they would not,' he replied sharply (his temper was sadly ruffled to-day). 'If I gave you my toe-nails to touch, would they teach you what I am?'

'Well, no, dear; of course not,' was her meek reply.

'No more would leaves teach you what a tree is,' he continued. 'Leaves are little green things that grow all over trees. But, dear me! you don't know what *green* is, do you?'

'Never mind, love,' she replied cheerfully, for his voice sounded very fretful. 'I don't care about knowing. That is enough about trees. Tell me about the grass, now.'

'Oh yes,' he cried, recovering himself; 'I might have brought you some of that. Grass is like bits of string, that grow standing straight up all over the ground. It is green, too. And when you walk on it, it is soft and cool. I wish I had thought of bringing you some.'

'And the daisies, dear?' asked Susie, after waiting some little time for him to go on.

'Oh, *they* are beautiful!' cried Paul, to whom everything in the shape of a flower was a treasure. 'Little white things all round, with yellow in the middle, and some of them have pretty pink at their edges; and, do you know, Susie, they shut themselves up at night, and go to sleep. Then, there were yellow buttercups, too; and——'

'I know a song about them,' interrupted Susie.

“‘Buttercups and daisies,  
Oh, the pretty flowers!’”

And she added, with the faintest sigh: ‘I have often wondered what they are.’

But the sigh was not too faint for Paul’s quick ears. He heard it; and, looking at the sad blue eyes by his side, and remembering how hopelessly dark everything was to them, his loving little heart swelled with pity. Throwing his arms round her neck, he murmured:

‘My poor little Susie! It *is* a shame! You can’t see anything; and there is no way of telling you what nice things are. Oh, I do so wish I could give you one of my eyes. We could do with one apiece, couldn’t we, dear? But I can’t. Never mind, love! You shall have the daisies, and the buttercups too; and you shall hold them in your hands and see what you can make of them. It was right silly of me to forget them this morning; but I will go to-morrow, dear, and gather you a whole bunch.’

Susie was delighted.

‘What a dear kind boy my Paul is,’ she said, returning his caress fondly. ‘But isn’t it a very long way to the park, love? Won’t you be tired?’

‘Oh no,’ he replied. ‘It *is* a long way, but I shall not be tired. I can walk very far.’

Soon after this Bridget returned. Paul saw her coming up the court, and ran to meet her.

‘Has Charlie told you all about my dad?’ he asked eagerly.

She kissed him, and replied, ‘Yes.’ So he was satisfied; all the more satisfied because he did not see the wink she gave Tom, as she took her bonnet off, nor hear her whispered, ‘No such luck! It is only a fancy of the child’s.’

About half an hour after, he took leave of Susie, and set himself to walk quietly home to get his tea. But, alas! his persecution was not over even for that night. Billy caught sight of him as he passed by, and, following him once more, took up the cry that Paul found so bitterly humiliating: ‘There goes the granny’s boy!’ With swelling breast and quivering lips, he hurried along as fast as he could; but Billy kept closely in pursuit, and it was not until they came to the street where Paul’s friend of the morning lived, that

he went off and left him alone. He only did so then, because he had a wholesome fear of again falling into the hands of the powerful stranger. He need not, however, have been afraid, for the man was no longer there. Paul glanced at the house as he ran sobbing past it, but the door was shut, and no one was sitting on the doorstep.

His tears were indeed falling fast when he reached his home; but here, to his disappointment, he found very little sympathy. He could not find words to explain all the various emotions of indignation, wounded pride, and anger that were causing him such deep distress. All the explanation he could give, was that 'Billy Blake had been calling him names.'

Old Mrs. Vogan took him on her knee, and, as she wiped his eyes, she joined her voice to Charlie's in trying to laugh him into smiles again.

'Names could not hurt him,' they both said; 'and, after all, Billy's tongue was his own, and they could not quarrel with him for using it as he chose. Paul must be a sensible lad, and not mind him. Only silly boys got vexed when they were called names.'

Paul allowed his grief to be calmed, but his heart was very heavy. He felt that they did not understand his trouble, that there was no way of making them understand it, and that he must bear it all by himself. Terribly heavy he found it, almost too heavy for his six years to support. All his future happiness depended upon the speedy return of his dad; and he was afraid to think what his life would be if by any chance he should fail to come. As he had told Susie, 'he was quite sure his heart would break.' In the evening he would not go as usual to chat with his little blind friend. He told his granny that he would stay with her instead, and he kept his reason, viz., 'that he was afraid of meeting Billy, and of being again called by that dreadful name of "granny's boy," to himself.'

Charlie lifted Mrs. Vogan's rocking-chair outside on to the pavement, so that she might enjoy the evening air and bright sunset; and he sat with Paul on the doorstep close by her; and here they spent a pleasant hour, chatting quietly together. At least, Charlie and Mrs. Vogan chatted; but Paul had very little to say for himself. His face wore an

uneasy expression that showed his thoughts were very troubled. Who could tell the wondering, and the hoping, and the planning of that tiny brain? Not Charlie; for he suddenly cried:

'Hallo, Paul, wake up! Why, you look as grave as old Sandy Greentops the night his donkey died! You are not bothering yourself yet about Billy, are you?'

No,' replied Paul; 'I was only trying to make out why my dad has never come to see me all these years.'

'All what years?' asked Charlie.

'All the years since I was borned,' said Paul. 'They are a great many, Charlie. Where has my dear daddy been all that time?'

But Charlie made no answer. He only caught him up in his strong arms, and tossed him high in the air, and put him on his shoulder, and ran up and down the street with him, as if he were determined to shake all remembrance of his father out of his small frame. He was not successful. Paul did not laugh and shout as he generally did when Charlie romped with him. All the notice he took of the game was to say, perhaps the slightest bit peevishly: 'Put me down, Charlie, please.'

'You're cross,' said Charlie, a little disappointed.

Paul sighed. 'No,' he replied, 'I'm not cross; but I think I am tired.'

He must have been; for when Charlie put him down, he went and seated himself at his granny's feet, and pillowed his head in the folds of her dress. When they next looked at him he was fast asleep.

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## CHAPTER XV.

'The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all.'—PROVERBS xxii. 2.

THE morning following, Paul awoke very late. The first thing he noticed when he sat up in bed and rubbed his little eyes, was that the sun was shining brightly into the room. There it was, streaming through the yellow blind, along the floor, and playing on the wall just above his head. He

looked at it, but no corresponding brightness darted from his heart. On the contrary, all within him was very gloomy and heavy. Old Mrs. Vogan had to call him two or three times before he obeyed, and came downstairs to his breakfast. When he at last did so, she immediately noticed his sad little face, and cried in some concern :

‘Why, what ails my merry lad? He is not sick, is he?’

Paul drew a long sigh, as he replied : ‘No, granny, I am not sick ; but I’ve had bad dreams, and I feel very miserable.’

‘Bad dreams!’ she repeated ; ‘what business have bad dreams to come to my boy? Was it the apple-dumpling yesterday, dearie? My mind misgave me that the paste wasn’t half boiled. Show granny your tongue.’ But the tongue told no tales ; so the old woman took him in her arms, and as his curly head rested against her shoulder, she asked : ‘What was the dream that has made my bright boy look so grave?’

‘I dreamt,’ said Paul, ‘that I was looking everywhere for my dad, but I couldn’t find him,’ and he shook his head sadly.

‘Well, but that is no bad dream,’ cried Mrs. Vogan. ‘You don’t want your dad.’

‘Oh yes, I do,’ replied Paul ; ‘I want him very, very much.’

‘But why, dearie?’ she asked.

‘I dreamt, too,’ continued Paul, lowering his voice, ‘that thousands and thousands of lads were running after me, and shouting that I was only a granny’s boy.’

His tone was very solemn as he answered her question thus. He thought she would now quite understand all he was suffering. But not at all. She made matters ten times worse, for she laughed as she replied :

‘Well, love, and ain’t you a granny’s boy?’

Paul’s soul sank to the lowest depth of despair. ‘I suppose I am,’ he replied, in the tone of a martyr resigning himself to his fate. What a ‘granny’s boy’ meant, or if the word had any meaning at all, he never asked himself. He took for granted that it was a term of reproach that could be justly applied to him, and all because his daddy would not come home. If he had only had the sense to put all this into words, Mrs. Vogan could soon have laughed all his trouble away ; but he had not. He could only lean his head

on her kind breast and feel, as he said, very miserable indeed.

'Ain't you a granny's boy?' she repeated, giving him a fond kiss. Ah! if she had only known what it cost him to murmur that low 'Yes.' 'And don't you love your own granny?' she persisted, a little hurt by his listless voice and manner.

Paul's reply was to throw his arms round her neck, and give her an embrace that quite satisfied her. He would not have been our grateful, warm-hearted little Paul, if he had not had a rich store of love to give to this kind old woman, who had been such a devoted mother to him.

'There,' cried Mrs. Vogan, as she returned his caress, 'go and get your breakfast before it's all cold. Dear, dear; there is the church clock striking nine! I never knew you sleep so late before. Maybe it was the dreams.'

She went off then to slowly mount the stairs, and begin her daily work of putting her small house in order. When she came down again, Paul had finished his breakfast, and was sitting on the doorstep, quiet and grave.

'Are you going to Susie, dearie?' she asked.

'No,' he replied.

'Are you quite sure you're not sick, love?' she said, a little anxiously.

He was so unlike himself this morning. She could not understand it.

'No,' he answered, 'I am not a bit sick.'

'Then why won't you go to Susie, and help her to thread her pretty beads?'

Paul hesitated.

'Because—because——' he began, and then stopped. No, it was impossible. He could not explain to her how he shrank from Billy's taunts; how he dreaded to be surrounded and shouted at by the boys of the court, as he had been yesterday. 'I want to stay with you,' was all he could say, and he said it very fretfully.

'So you shall, love,' she cried. 'You shall stay and take care of your old granny, like a fine little man; and we will go for a walk together, and buy Charlie some dinner.'

So saying, she put on her bonnet, and the two set off. They were out quite an hour; for Mrs. Vogan was beginning to walk very slowly. She returned with her apron full of

broad beans, which she gave Paul to shell while she got the pan ready to boil them. 'Beans and salt and bread would be a dinner fit for a prince,' so she assured him.

Charlie came home soon after twelve, and it was when their simple noon-day meal was over that he said (looking at Paul's little bare feet, for the child was nearly always bare-footed in warm weather):

'Run upstairs, Paul, and put on your shoes and stockings. I am going to take you with me to the yard this afternoon.'

The 'yard' was where Charlie worked. Now and then Paul was allowed to accompany him there, and spend the afternoon in sauntering about, watching the workmen at their several occupations. This was one of his great treats. Quiet and unobtrusive in his habits, given to wondering rather than to asking questions, he was never in anybody's way. Moreover, he was a great favourite with all Charlie's fellow-workmen. No one was ever too busy to exchange a pleasant word with quiet little dark-eyed Paul. Even the gruff old carter, who was never known to speak civilly to anyone, was once heard to say: 'How are you, Paul?' And in reply to the simple 'Quite well, thank you, sir,' he had actually gone on to ask him if he would like a ride, and had lifted him on to his great black horse and led him carefully round the yard. Oh yes; this 'yard' was a wonderful place to Paul. There were great stacks of timber there, that he liked to look at, and wonder how it had been piled so high, and trace out the way he would go supposing the wolf of Susie's story of 'Little Red Riding Hood' were after him, and he had to climb to the top for safety. Then there was the great steam saw, and the engine that worked it, and the lathes, and men cutting, and chopping, and planing, and painting, and doing all kinds of wonderful things that he was never tired of looking at.

Well, this afternoon, Paul had as usual been sauntering about watching first this and then that, when he at last drew near a man who was mixing some paint. This paint was a beautiful red in colour, so bright that it made Paul's eyes sparkle. 'How pretty a dress would be like that for granny,' he thought. 'No, not for granny. I think she looks better in brown, after all; but for Susie. Susie would look lovely in a frock that colour.' Then he drew a little sigh as he

remembered that all frocks were alike to poor blind Susie ; and he began to think how nice it would be if she could only see. How they would stroll round the yard together, and what pleasant talks they would have about all the wonderful things to be seen in it.

Poor little Susie ! He thought about her with great sympathy for some few moments. Then he began to wonder what she was doing ; and then he suddenly remembered with distress his promise to get her some buttercups and daisies. Oh dear ! he ought to have gone for them the first thing that morning. She would be sitting in her little chair wondering why he did not bring them. How unkind of him to have forgotten ! He felt so guilty that he quite blushed. Then he glanced at the sky. The sun was shining very brightly. It must still be quite early. He would have plenty of time to go for the flowers, if he were only quick ; and deciding thus, he ran hastily out of the yard. No one saw him go. The attention of each workman was engaged upon the particular task he had in hand. The man who was mixing the paint did not even notice that the little fellow had left his side, and Charlie was away on a message : and so there was no one to prevent, or warn, poor little Paul from setting off all by himself, at three o'clock on a September afternoon, to walk to a park lying quite four miles away from his home.

He had gone the same distance the day before ; but he quite forgot that he had ridden most of the way upon Charlie's back. By the time the first mile and a half were over, he began to feel the want of that kind back. He had intended to run all the way, and though he soon found that this was impossible, he nevertheless walked very quickly along—very quickly indeed for such little legs. Fortunately the road was level, and lay through wide busy thoroughfares where there was plenty to amuse him, and prevent his mind dwelling on the length of the way.

At the end of the second mile, he stopped, partly to rest, and partly to watch the setting to rights of an omnibus that had broken down in the middle of the road. This proved so interesting, that not until the wheel had been temporarily fixed, and the omnibus was rolling away in the distance, did he remember the buttercups and daisies. Then he started off on the third mile. He had to stop two or three times



during that third mile, and when he began the fourth, he was more tired than he had ever thought it possible he could be. Still he trudged bravely on. The idea of turning back without the flowers for Susie, never entered his head. On he went, keeping his eyes fixed upon some foliage hanging like a shadow far before him. He knew the park was there. He remembered the way quite well ; but, oh ! it was dreadfully long.

How thankful he was when he at last saw the big iron gates, and then passed through them, and found himself upon the cool green grass. He turned his steps first of all towards the lake, for he felt he must rest ; and where could he rest so well as by that beautiful broad sheet of water with the overhanging trees reflected in its depths, and the white swans passing to and fro on its quiet ripples, and the lilies with their thick leaves and white blossoms lying here and there on its bosom ? A sloping bank, some four feet in height, skirted it. Paul trudged down and seated himself under the shade of some clustering trees, close to the edge, where, fortunately, the water was very shallow. Here he took off his boots and stockings, and rolling his trousers above his knees, he put his tired little feet into the water. How delightfully cool it was ! He lay back against the grassy bank behind him, and rested thoroughly and sweetly. Everything was very still, for the afternoon was now far advanced, and the groups of children and nurses, and other park-loungers, were gone to their several homes.

There was the muffled hum of the busy City behind him, the rustle of the breeze amid the leaves above him, the chirping of the birds around him, and this was all. He sighed, as he felt the presence of a great calm and tranquillity reigning around and falling upon him. He looked absently at the waving branches, at the shadows, at the lazy ripples, at the water-lilies, and lastly at the swans. How stately they were ! how white they were ! and how grave they looked ! He wondered if they ever laughed ! No, he should think not. How they moved along and turned about—without a single splash, too. How quickly they went ! Just wherever they pleased. Now close under the trees, right into the darkest part of the shadow ; now out again to where the dancing ripples, beneath the warm light of the

setting sun, were shining like melted gold, now in and out of the water-lilies. How he would like to be with them among those floating blossoms! What a nice broad back that largest swan had! How easily he could sit upon it, and so ride all over the lake! How splendid that would be, if only the swan would let him! He wondered if it would. There could be no harm in asking, at all events. So he sat up and called: 'Here, swan! swan! swan! Come here!' The swan turned its grave-looking eyes towards him. 'Come here,' continued Paul, beckoning; 'I want to speak to you.' And lo, the swan immediately began to sail, sail, until it reached Paul's side. 'Will you please let me get on to your back?' he asked, very coaxingly. 'I am not at all heavy, and I will sit very still, and not hurt you one bit. I would so like to go all over the water as you do. It must be so nice to sail so quietly under the trees and between the pretty lilies. But I don't know how to swim; and unless you will kindly take me on your nice back, I shall not be able to go.' The swan made no reply; but it turned sideways and came as close to the water's edge as it possibly could. And then it turned and looked at Paul, and its bright quiet eyes said as plainly as eyes could say: 'Come along, and we will go.' Paul needed no second invitation.

Springing up with a cry of delight, he seated himself astride upon the bird's white-feathered back, and clasping its long arched neck with his small hands, away they went. Was it pleasant? Oh, 'pleasant' is no word to describe the exquisite delight of that wonderful ride, or sail—which ought it to be called? Paul was quivering with happiness. His little naked feet were hanging in the cool water, the breeze was gently raising his black curls and fanning his flushed cheeks, and the sparkle of pleasure in his dark eyes would have rivalled the brightest diamond. On they went, past the lilies and the bending reeds, down where the shadows were dark and deep, out where the ripples were dancing with light, on where the trees overhung, and where the waving branches touched them as they passed—in and out, keeping time to the murmur of the water—turning the corner where the bank rose high and steep; onwards, onwards, till the lake widened into a flowing river, and the land at each side was gay with flowers, and a shadowy

country lay in the distance that Paul fancied he had seen before, and as they drew near, he strained his eyes eagerly, trying his best to pierce a strange mist that seemed to be gathering suddenly around, and shrouding it from his view. But closer and closer fell that mist—closer—and yet closer.

Paul was fast asleep. How long he slept he never knew; perhaps merely some twenty minutes. Surely some sweet guardian angel kept watch beside him, or sheltered, as he was by the rising of the bank, from the view of passers-by, he might have slumbered on until the veil of night shrouded the earth, and gleams from the pale moon awoke him, to start, and shriek, and spring to his feet, and find a certain grave in the dark water before him. This, indeed, might easily have happened; but an unexpected friend was at hand to prevent it. Paul was aroused by feeling some one shaking him by the shoulder. He half-opened his eyes—but he was very tired, and would have liked to shut them again directly. But whoever was kneeling by him, had no idea of permitting this. He was shaken more vigorously than ever, and a voice cried:

‘Get up—get up this minute! Don’t you know it is very dangerous to fall asleep on the grass? And so near the lake, too! Why, you might have been drowned! Get up and come away. You are half in the water! You poor little sparrow!’

‘I am not a sparrow,’ replied Paul sleepily, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. ‘I am a lad.’

‘I know that,’ said the voice; ‘but you are a sparrow, too. Mamma always calls little children like you “sparrows.” Why, it is Paul!’

Paul had stopped rubbing his eyes by this, and had turned his face towards the voice to see who was speaking to him. It was Miss Ethel Dunraven, the little lady who had brought Susie the beads. They recognised each other at the same moment.

‘How do you do?’ said Paul, for Miss Ethel was too much astonished to speak.

‘I am quite well, thank you,’ she replied, recovering herself; ‘but I am so surprised to see you here. It is so far from where you live.’

‘Yes,’ said Paul, ‘it is. I didn’t think it was nearly so

far. My feet quite smarted with walking. That is why I put them in the water.'

'I think you had better take them out now,' she observed, 'and put on your shoes and stockings again. I am afraid you will take cold. Why, if I did that, I believe I should be dead in a week.'

'Ah, then you are what they call delicate !' said Paul.

'Yes,' she replied, 'delicate ; that is what everybody calls me.'

'Susie is delicate,' observed Paul, as he shook the water from his feet and put on his socks ; 'but I am very strong.'

'How is Susie ?' asked the little lady ; 'and how does she like her beads ?'

'She is quite well ; and she likes the beads better than anything she ever had,' replied Paul ; 'but she has nearly threaded them all now. I think there are very few left in the box.'

'My mamma is coming home from France some time this week,' said Miss Ethel, 'and then Susie shall have some more. She is to have three different colours next time : white, blue and yellow. Mamma said so.'

'Colours are of no use to Susie,' said Paul, buttoning his boots ; 'she can't tell which is which one bit.'

'Ah, but she will know each bead by its shape,' explained the little girl ; 'of course each colour will be a different shape. Then when they are all mixed well together, it will be pleasant work for her to pick them out, and thread them properly.'

'How will she have to thread them ?' asked Paul ; 'first a white, and then a blue, and then a yellow ?'

'Very likely,' was the answer ; 'but mamma will tell us when she comes home. Has Susie made any mistakes in threading the beads she has ?'

'She always makes a good many mistakes when I am not watching her,' replied Paul. 'She often puts four blue ones altogether, or p'raps three white ones, or something like that. But when I tell her it is wrong, she undoes them and threads them over again.'

'That is quite right,' said Miss Ethel. 'Mamma said she was to put first a white bead, and then a blue one ; and that she was not to make *one* mistake.'

'But why?' asked Paul.

'Because she is going to work for money,' was the reply; 'and when people work for money, they should do the work exactly as they are told, or else they have no right to be paid for it.'

Paul was about to make some observation upon this last remark, when the whole subject of the beads was quite driven from his mind by seeing little Miss Ethel stoop down and raise a large doll from the grass. Dolly wore a dress of rose-coloured cashmere, and a mantle of velvet, and a hat and feathers, that Paul thought were very beautiful.

'Oh!' he exclaimed in wondering admiration.

'Do you take any interest in dolls?' asked Ethel, observing that his eyes were fixed on Dolly's pretty clothes; 'because if you do I shall be very happy to introduce this little girl to you. Her name is Florence Elizabeth Susannah: Florence after my mamma, her grandmamma; Elizabeth after me, her mamma (Elizabeth is my second name); and Susannah after our cook, who is her godmamma. Florence Elizabeth Susannah, my dear, this is Paul, blind Susie's friend Paul. Make a bow and say, "How do you do?"'

By the kindly aid of her mamma, Florence Elizabeth Susannah obeyed, much to Paul's amazement.

Matter-of-fact in the extreme, he did not know what to make of all this; and he eyed Florence Elizabeth Susannah a little suspiciously, not being quite certain that she was not some dwarfed specimen of the human race.

'Perhaps you would like to shake hands with her,' said Miss Ethel presently. 'Very gently, if you please, or you will break her fingers.'

Paul took hold of the tiny hand held towards him, and observing that it was really made of wax, and that the miniature face so close to his was of the same material, and that the bright blue eyes looking straight at him were nothing but glass, he became reassured.

'How pretty she is!' he said.

'Hush!' cried Miss Ethel in an undertone. 'No compliments, if you please; they make young ladies vain. I am sorry to say that Florence Elizabeth Susannah is inclined to be vain. I have great trouble in keeping her away from the looking-glass. If she were allowed, she would spend the

whole day there. That is why I never like anyone to call her pretty.' And she added aloud, looking gravely at the waxen beauty in her arms as she spoke: 'Passable: that is all Florence Elizabeth Susannah can ever hope to be—passable, just passable in a crowd.'

'Then she *is* alive?' ventured Paul, the look of suspicion returning to his features.

'Alive?' repeated Miss Ethel inquiringly; and then, perhaps guessing from his sober face what was passing in his mind, she continued with a merry laugh: 'Why, what a funny boy you are! She is only a doll. Dolls are never alive.'

'I know that,' cried Paul; 'but you spoke as if she was alive.'

'Because I pretend she is,' was the answer. 'so as to have some play, you know.'

'Oh!' replied Paul. He could understand this, and was getting interested.

'Yes,' she continued; 'I have seven dolls, and I pretend they are all alive. I have two baby dolls, two little boy dolls, and three young lady dolls. The babies are in the nursery. One of them, I am grieved to say, has the whooping-cough. But all children have whooping-cough. I have had it myself twice. I think baby will get over it. One of the little boys is also very ill. His name is George Selby St. Clair, from "Uncle Tom's Cabin," you know.'

Paul did not know at all; but seeing from Miss Ethel's manner that an answer was expected, and having a dim idea that *something* was ill, but whether a boy or a doll he could not quite make out, he replied:

'I hope it will soon be better.'

'You mean George Selby St. Clair,' she observed. 'Yes, I think he will soon be better. I put a mustard-plaster on his chest and throat last night. I made it of yellow paint, out of my paint-box, spread on brown paper. And though he cried dreadfully, I made him keep it on twenty minutes. That is what they do to me when I have a bad cold.'

'Oh!' replied Paul; 'then George Sel—— what is his name, has a bad cold, has he?'

'George Selby St. Clair,' explained the little lady. 'Yes, he has a *very* bad cold. He has been in bed for two days. I am sorry he is so shut up—this beautiful weather, too;

but it is quite his own fault ; he was disobedient. In spite of all I said, he would go on the wet grass one afternoon when we were in the garden. It had been raining all morning, so of course he got his feet wet, and he has been ill ever since.'

'Of course,' repeated Paul, not knowing what else to reply.

'I have a great deal of trouble with my children,' went on Miss Ethel, with a sigh and a shake of the head that made Paul's little face grow troubled with sympathy. 'The three young ladies, in particular, are a great charge. They have just begun to learn French, and they don't like it at all. That is to say, they don't like the verbs. They did very well till they got to them ; but now it is dreadful ! Only think how distressed I am to find that, though I do my best to explain to them that

" Nous eûmes,  
Vous eûtes,  
Ils ou elles eurent,"

is not only very good sense, but quite necessary to be learned and remembered, they won't believe me ; they actually won't believe me. Why, this morning, Helena Penelope Jane, my second young lady, went so far as to declare that

" J'eus,  
Tu eus,  
Il eut,"

was nothing but nonsense. Now, what do you think of that ?

'I think she was quite right,' replied Paul. 'What you said just then *is* nonsense ; I am sure it is !'

'Do you really think so ?' cried Miss Ethel. And when Paul persisted that he did, she added in a confidential tone, 'Well, so do I ; but I would not tell Miss Langton so on any account, because she has taken such trouble to explain how very useful it will be when I know it all, and am able to talk French nicely. I have told all this over and over again to my three young ladies, but they don't seem to be any the better for it. I believe they have made up their minds that they will *not* learn French ; so I have made up my mind that they shall. I began this morning. Helena Penelope Jane and Rosalie Beatrice Maria would not even make an attempt to say the "*Imparfait de l'Indicatif*." They said the "*Présent*" was already too much for them, and

they did not want any "Imparfait." I put them both into a dark cupboard. I intend them to remain there until they choose to be obedient. Florence Elizabeth Susannah was wiser. She did her best with the "Imparfait," so I said I would give her a treat. I brought her with me this afternoon. She thinks it a *great* treat to come out with me.'

'Oh !' was the only observation Paul deemed it prudent to make. He was enjoying all this chatter, and he was afraid of letting the little lady see that he did not in the least understand what it was all about, for fear he should hear no more.

After a pause, during which Dolly's mantle was put straight, her flaxen curls smoothed behind her ears, and the bows of her hat arranged, Miss Ethel continued :

'Yes, Florence Elizabeth Susannah has had a very great treat to-day ; she has been all over the park, and seen all there is to be seen. She likes the water best, especially when the sun is shining upon it. Miss Langton is talking to a poor sailor. He has been shipwrecked, and suffered terribly. His history is very sad, but very long. I listened to a great deal of it, and then Florence Elizabeth Susannah begged me so hard to take her to the water's edge, that I could not refuse her ; so I left Miss Langton and the sailor, and came here, where I found you fast asleep. I was so afraid you would get drowned that I shook you as hard as I could. Then you awoke, and I saw that you were Paul.'

Just at this moment a voice behind the children called : 'Ethel ! Ethel !'

The little girl sprang up instantly, crying : 'Yes, Miss Langton, I am here !' And Paul turning round saw, on the pathway above, the lady who had accompanied Miss Ethel the day she had brought Susie the beads.

'Come along, dear,' said Miss Langton, as Ethel reached her side ; 'we ought to have been home half an hour ago. The account of that poor sailor's misfortunes was so interesting that I quite forgot how the time was getting on. I will tell you all about it when we get home. We must make haste. Your mamma said particularly you were never to be out after sunset ; and look, I declare the sun is setting already. Come along.'

But Ethel stood still.



'I am sure Paul ought to come too,' she said. 'He lives such a long way from here ; much farther than we do.'

'Paul ?' exclaimed Miss Langton ; 'who is Paul ?'

'Don't you know Paul ?' asked Ethel ; 'the good little boy that Bridget told you so much about ? The one who has made poor Susie so happy lately ? See, he is there ! I found him fast asleep, with his legs and feet in the water ; so I awoke him, and I have been talking to him ever since.'

'Ah, yes ! I remember his little face,' cried Miss Langton, giving Paul a nod and a smile. 'But do come along quickly, dear ; it is really getting very late.'

'But, Miss Langton, won't you send Paul home before we go ?' urged Ethel, still lingering. 'If he stays here much longer, it will be dark, and he will not be able to find his way, and perhaps he will get lost. Then poor Susie will be very unhappy. Bridget says she is dreadfully fond of Paul.'

'*Dreadfully fond* is an exceedingly inelegant expression, my dear,' observed Miss Langton. 'Say *very fond*, that is quite sufficient.'

'But I mean far more than "very,"' replied Ethel. 'Susie really loves Paul. Bridget told me so ; and if he were lost, she would be quite miserable. I am sure she must be so very unhappy already, poor little blind girl ! that I would not like her to have any fresh trouble ; so please make Paul come home with us.'

'My dear,' observed Miss Langton gravely, 'I cannot do that. It would not be at all correct for Paul to walk with us. I know he is a very good little boy, and that we are only doing our duty when we are kind to the poor, and all that ; but to walk with dusty, humbly-clad children, is an exaggeration of duty, and——'

'Oh, I will walk with him,' interrupted Ethel. 'He is rather dusty, certainly ; but then it has been a very dusty afternoon, and perhaps he has no clothes-brush. I will hold his hand tight, so that he won't be able to come near you, Miss Langton.'

'My dear Ethel, you are the strangest child !' cried the lady. 'I am sure it is delightful, and we ought all to be pleased to see you begin so early to interest yourself in charitable work. But there is such a thing as *propriety*, my

dear ; you must learn to consider *propriety*. It would look ridiculous, and, moreover, have the appearance of making a boast and a show of benevolence, if young ladies, attired in velvet and silk, were seen walking hand in hand with poor little boys like Paul. If your mamma were here she would tell you the same. Now let us go, dear.'

'If mamma were here,' persisted Ethel, 'I am sure she would find some way of getting Paul home. If it is not right for him to walk with me, she would think of something else. I am sure she would never leave him here all by himself. Do get him home some way, please, Miss Langton. Susie will break her heart if he is lost.'

'The little fellow is certainly a very long way from the part of the City where he lives,' observed Miss Langton, beginning to consider the matter. 'Is it possible he can be here alone? Come to me, my boy.'

These last words were addressed to Paul, who obeyed at once, and soon stood before her.

'Are you here all by yourself?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied.

'You should say "Yes, ma'am,"' she said reprovingly.

'Yes, ma'am,' instantly repeated Paul, who had no idea what the word 'ma'am' meant, but who was, as usual, anxious to please.

'But did you walk all this way alone?' she asked, noticing for the first time how very small he was.

'Yes,' replied Paul.

'Yes—what?' said Miss Langton gravely.

'Yes, nothing,' answered Paul, a little alarmed by the lady's solemn face.

'Yes, *ma'am*,' explained Ethel. 'You must always say "*ma'am*," Paul, when a lady speaks to you.'

'Must I?' cried Paul. 'I didn't know. I'll say it next time.'

'And have you to walk all the way back again?' continued Miss Langton, thinking at the same time that Paul was very small indeed—much too small for such a journey.

'Yes,' he replied.

'Yes, *ma'am*,' gently murmured Ethel.

'Yes, ma'am,' repeated Paul brightly.

But Miss Langton was not listening. She had raised her

hand to her chin, and appeared to be considering. Presently she cried :

‘I know what we can do, Ethel !—the very thing I believe your mamma would do, if she were here. An omnibus runs from the park-gates right down into the City. We will put Paul into it, and ask the guard to see that he gets out at the bottom of Chirton Street ; that is only about five minutes’ walk from Susie’s home, and I suppose he lives somewhere about there. That will settle the matter nicely—but—why—wherever—oh dear !——’

‘What is it ?’ asked Ethel anxiously, for Miss Langton had gone quite pale, and was hurriedly turning out one pocket after the other.

‘My purse, dear,’ she now said, still busily searching. ‘I was wondering if I had the change for Paul’s omnibus fare ; but I am afraid—that is, I fear—oh dear !—yes, yes ! I have ! Oh, Ethel, my child, I have lost my purse !’

‘Lost your purse !’ repeated Ethel in dismay.

‘Yes, dear,’ exclaimed the lady ; ‘and there were five pounds in it. I intended to call and pay a bill for your mamma on our way home. Yes, look, it is quite gone !’ exhibiting her pocket turned inside out ; ‘there is nothing here but my keys and my handkerchief, and your cough lozenges. Oh dear, dear ! what shall I do ?’

‘When had you it last ?’ asked Ethel, full of dismay, for Miss Langton appeared to be in great distress.

‘When had I it last, dear ?’ she repeated, pausing to consider. ‘Now, when *had* I it last ? Ah, to be sure !—that poor sailor !—I took it out of my pocket to give him a shilling ; of course I did. I thought he looked as if he could do with it ; but he wouldn’t have it. Oh yes ! I certainly took the purse out of my pocket then.’

‘You may have dropped it,’ exclaimed Ethel ; ‘I will go and look. Come, Paul, you can help me. Miss Langton was sitting on that seat over there. The purse must be lying somewhere near it.’

The two children set off at a quick run, and were hurriedly followed by the lady. The purse was nowhere near the seat. They all three searched about. Paul went on his hands and knees and felt in the grass, and Ethel examined every inch of the pathway. It was of no use. No purse was to be seen.

They had been looking perhaps twenty minutes, when Miss Langton suddenly caught sight of the sun sinking rapidly below the horizon.

'Come along, Ethel,' she said; 'the purse is evidently not here. Some passer-by must have picked it up. Dear, dear! how very unfortunate! Well, it cannot be helped. Come along, dear; it is getting quite dark. If you take cold, it will be worse than all.'

'Come, Paul,' cried Ethel; 'we must go.'

But Paul suddenly remembered the buttercups and daisies that until now he had quite forgotten.

'I can't go yet,' he cried, and throwing himself down once more in the grass, he began to gather the flowers as hard as he could.

'Oh, but you *must* come,' said Ethel; 'Miss Langton is in a great hurry; we mustn't keep her waiting any longer.'

'I can't go without a bunch of buttercups and daisies,' replied Paul. 'Why, that is all I came for.'

'Well, you can come for some another day,' urged Ethel.

'No, I can't,' said Paul, picking away. 'I must take them *now*.'

He was thinking how disappointed blind Susie would be if he went back without them. Meanwhile Miss Langton was getting not only impatient, but really alarmed.

'Ethel,' she now said gravely, 'do you see that the sun has quite gone, and that it is already evening? Have you forgotten how anxious your mamma is that you should not take cold this autumn, but be strong and well, and able to spend the winter in England? You know how wishful I am that she should find you in good health when she comes home. Don't give me so much trouble, my dear; when I tell you to come, you ought to come at once.'

'But Paul!' cried Ethel entreatingly. 'Make him come too, Miss Langton.'

'Paul,' said Miss Langton sternly, 'come this moment.'

'I'll come in a minute,' replied Paul, looking up from his task with flushed cheeks.

'In a minute won't do,' cried the lady; 'come *now*.'

'I can't,' said Paul, shaking his head; 'I haven't half enough daisies yet.'

Perhaps Miss Langton forgot the time he had spent in

looking willingly for her lost purse; certainly she had no idea what importance he attached to his simple nosegay, and she was getting painfully anxious about her young pupil, so she said, in a tone of great displeasure:

'You are a very naughty little boy—very disrespectful, and shockingly disobedient. We have done all we can for you; and if you are lost, it will be quite your own fault. Come along, Ethel, this moment.'

But Ethel's blue eyes grew dim with tears.

'I am sure mamma would like us to *make* him come,' she said with a little sob. 'Suppose he falls asleep again by the water? There will be no one to awake him, and he will get drowned.'

'Well, dear, we cannot help it,' began Miss Langton; but Ethel interrupted her.

'Then Susie will have no one to play with,' she said; 'and she will be miserable.'

Miss Langton glanced again at Paul. He was still busily picking in the grass, and showed no intention of coming away. Meanwhile a cool breeze sprang up that caused the lady to utter an exclamation of distress.

'Paul found his way here,' she said hurriedly, 'and doubtless he will be quite able to find his way back again. Children of his class are accustomed to the streets. At all events, I cannot help it. I would have taken him home with us, and sent one of the servants to see him safely to where he lives, but, you see, he won't come, and I cannot be expected to drag or carry him. It is far too late for you to be out. Look at the mist rising from the lake! Give me your hand and come along. It is not like you to be so disobedient.'

Ethel suffered herself to be led quickly away; but she was terribly pained to leave blind Susie's only playfellow behind her. However, there was no help for it. She could do nothing more than she had done. Miss Langton was hurrying her quickly along. When they arrived at the iron gates, she turned her head and took one more tearful glance at the little figure still kneeling in the grass, and a few seconds later she had left it far behind her.

As for Paul, he had paid very little attention to what had been going on, being altogether occupied with gathering his

buttercups and daisies. Not until his little hands could hold no more did he discover that he was all by himself. Then he got up from his knees and looked about him. He felt a little frightened, for it was now quite dusk. The tall trees were casting long moving shadows across the grass. The murmur of the leaves, as it caught his ear, seemed to have a mournful, almost threatening sound. The lake was no longer a sparkling mirror, reflecting the thousand beauties bending over it; but a dark, glittering, winding band, that might have been some subtle creature of life gliding treacherously along in search of victims.

Paul had never felt so small and helpless in all his life. The spot that had appeared a paradise of beauty in the glory of the afternoon sun, seemed alive with nameless horrors in the uncertain glimmer of closing twilight. He must get out of it as quickly as possible. Once upon the open road he would feel safe. No dangers lurked for him behind lamp-posts, or walls, or in the shadow of corners and alcoves. But here, how could he be sure that there was really nothing crouching in those dark bushes ready to spring upon him as he passed? So with beating heart, patter, patter went his little feet along the walk. Many a furtive glance did he cast around, many a frightened look did he dart behind, to satisfy himself that there was nothing running after him; and oh, what a sigh of relief he drew when he at last saw the big iron gates appearing dimly before him! Some few yards from these, standing under a spreading hawthorn tree, was a garden-seat; and as Paul drew near, he saw that a man was sitting upon it. He stopped running and eyed this man a little curiously, but not at all timidly, for he was not afraid of men and women. In the social class to which he belonged, children were not warned against crafty kidnappers, their simple, well-worn little garments offering no temptation to theft. All Paul feared was the terrible wolf of Red Riding Hood's history, and such-like creatures of his busy imagination.

As he stood for a second or two watching this man, and recovering his breath after his frightened scamper, he only wondered what he could be doing sitting there all alone in the quiet dusk of the evening; and then, a good deal reassured to know that a human being was within sight and

call, he walked quickly on. He was close to the man now, and he could see that he was doing nothing—nothing at all, but sitting there gazing absently before him. He must be thinking, and thinking of something very sad, too ; for just then he drew his hand across his brow, and heaved a sigh so deep, and loud, and hopeless, and weary, that it brought Paul to a standstill right before him in sympathizing concern. But a second later the little fellow's face lighted up with great pleasure, and with a beaming smile he ran to the man's side and cried :

'Oh, I am so glad to see you ! I was beginning to get quite frightened of being by myself.'

It was the kind stranger who had rescued him from angry Billy Blake. Paul had recognised the well-cut features in spite of a great transformation ; for the man was indeed completely changed. He was no longer in dirt and rags. He was washed, and shaved, and neatly dressed in the blue trousers and woollen shirt worn by sailors in the merchant service.

'You *do* look nice !' continued Paul, without giving the other time to speak. 'You are not a bit like you were yesterday ; but I knew you for all that. What are you looking so astonished at ? Don't you know me ? I am Paul.'

The man smiled, a bright hearty smile, that lighted up his face like a gleam of sunshine.

'I know you, you scamp !' he replied, placing his hands upon the child's shoulders, and giving him a slight shake expressive of satisfaction at seeing him again. 'Of course I know you. But what kind of eyes have you got, eh, to be spying *me* out ? Why, I'm no more like the man you saw yesterday than a red herring is like a bird of paradise !'

'I have very good eyes,' replied Paul. 'They see very well. I knew you in a minute. But you look beautiful now. Your clothes are all new, and you are so nice and clean. I like you ever so much better than I did yesterday. I think rags are horrid : don't you ?'

'If ever I came across such a chirpy bit of a fledgeling in all my life !' was all the man replied, after an amused stare of some seconds ; 'and such a size, too ! Not much higher than a halfpenny stick of barley-sugar.'

Paul looked very shocked.

'That is a dreadful story!' he observed gravely. 'You can see quite well that I am a great deal higher than any stick of barley-sugar that was ever made. If you tell stories the good Lord Jesus won't love you.'

The man started as the holy name fell upon his ears, and all the amusement died out of his features as he muttered to himself, '*The good Lord Jesus won't love me!* Ah! I've heard that before. Oh! the years, and the years!'

He was thinking of all the time that had glided by since he had learned to hear and mention the name of the gentle Saviour with all the reverence he now read in Paul's little face—of the days so long ago when all the unquestioning faith expressed in those wide-opened brown eyes had been his. Yes, it was true. Once he—even he—had believed heart and soul in the love of the holy Jesus of Nazareth. He smiled as he thought of it, but it was a very bitter smile, and succeeded by a sigh so deep that Paul was quite distressed.

'You are sad,' he said anxiously; 'what is the matter?'

'Matter?' replied the man, making an effort to speak cheerfully; 'what should there be the matter?'

'I don't know,' replied Paul; 'but I am sure there is something, or you wouldn't sigh so. Why are you so sad?'

'I am not sad,' cried the man. 'I am just as lively as "Polly put the kettle on."'

Paul grew grave again.

'That sounds like another story,' he said. 'Don't tell any more. Susie says the Lord Jesus can't love anyone that tells lies; and it's a dreadful thing not to be loved by the good, kind Lord Jesus.'

The man's reply was to lift the child on to his knee, and gaze earnestly into his dark eyes; then he brushed the curls from his brow; and then he sighed again.

'You're right, lad,' he observed presently, 'I am a bit sad; so I may as well own to it.'

'I knew you were,' cried Paul. 'I am sorry; but what are you sad about?'

The man drew another long sigh; then he threw out his arms and stretched himself as he said:

'You wouldn't understand if I took two years over telling



you, and I hope you never may. But it is enough to make a man sad to find himself living in an empty world.'

'An empty world!' repeated Paul, opening his eyes. 'Why, how can the world be empty when it is full of people?'

'Ah, yes!' he replied, 'full—very full, so it is. But none of them care for me, little Paul. That is what I meant by empty: out of the whole lot, the hundreds, and the thousands, and the millions, not one of them cares for me.'

'What a shame!' was Paul's indignant exclamation. 'But why don't they?'

Perhaps the man had never considered the question in this light; at all events, he could find no answer to it, and Paul continued consolingly:

'Never you mind! I'll care for you. Perhaps I shan't be able to care very much, as I am so little; but I'll care as much as ever I can; and I will ask Susie to care for you, too; so don't you be sad any more about *that*.'

The man laughed as he threw his arm round the boy's slight form, and said something about his being the rarest youngster he had ever come across in all his life. Then he asked:

'Why didn't you come for your half-crown this morning, as I told you? I was sitting on those steps waiting for you ever so long.'

'I quite forgot,' said Paul; 'but were you going to give me half-a-crown?'

'Yes,' cried the man, 'I was so! Well, what are you opening those bright eyes of yours about, eh?'

'Isn't half-a-crown a great deal of money?' asked Paul.

'P'raps it is for a mite of a chap like you,' was the answer.

'Anyhow, I meant to give you one this morning. What do you say to that?'

'Can't you give it me now?' asked Paul simply.

The man laughed again, and said he was a 'sharp one.' Then he put his hand into one of his pockets, and drew out a handful of silver from which he selected a half-crown.

'There!' he cried, placing the coin in the child's hand, 'there is the pay for your loaf, you rascal! Not that it pays you either; for when a man is next door to starving, bread is a lot more precious than the brightest gold ever dug out of the earth.'

Paul looked at his half-crown for some moments in silence, then he put it into his pocket ; but from the abstracted way he did so, it was evident his thoughts were not with it.

'What are you thinking of?' asked the man presently. 'Aren't you pleased?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'very ; but I was wondering where you got so much money from. Yesterday you told me you had none ; and now you have a whole handful. Did you get it when you walked into the City last night?'

'Supposing I did—what then?' said the man.

'Nothing ; only I wish you would tell me how to get some. Charlie often walks into the City, but he never gets any money. He has to work very hard for all he has, and he hasn't very much. He could never afford to give me a whole half-crown. If you will tell me how you get so many shillings and sixpences by just walking into the City, I'll tell him ; and he will be very glad.'

'Don't you begin to think about getting money, little one,' said the man, patting his cheek as he spoke. 'Leave all that alone for years to come, and go on thinking that the good Lord Jesus loves you.'

But there was a hopelessness and a sadness in the man's tone as he murmured these words, and in the sigh that accompanied them, that made Paul immediately cry out :

'There, you are sad again ! What for ? Not because no one cares for you this time. Didn't I tell you I would, and Susie, too. You can't be hungry either, with such lots of money ; nor tired, when you're sitting down. P'raps you're ill?'

'No,' said the man, 'I'm not ill.'

'P'raps your head aches? Granny's often does, when the asthma has got hold of her.'

'No, my head is a very good one. It never aches.'

'Then I can't think what it is,' said Paul, after a moment's reflection. 'I don't see what you have to sigh about. I am sure you *look* beautiful.'

The man gave a satisfied glance at his thick boots, at his blue trousers and shirt, and at the oilskin hat lying on the seat by his side. Then he observed :

'Yes, I think I shall do. I feel like myself once more now, and ready to set out on my journey.'

'Are you going a journey?' asked Paul.

'Ay, am I? A long journey, and a sad journey, too. But never mind that. Tell me what you are going to do with that bunch of daisies and buttercups you're holding so tight in your bit of a hand?'

'They are flowers for Susie,' replied Paul. 'I promised to get them for her. Oh dear!' he added, looking round in dismay, 'it is nearly dark, and I am so far from home. I must go.'

'Do you mean to say you are here all by yourself?' asked the man. 'Isn't that Charlie of yours somewhere about? They never let you come here alone—did they?'

'No one knew I was coming,' replied Paul. 'I just ran off to get some flowers for Susie; but I didn't think it would go dark so soon. I shall never be able to find my way back. What shall I do?'

'Well, I don't see that there is anything for you but to stay with me,' replied the man, after a short pause of consideration. 'We mustn't have you lost. Why, we must be over four miles from where I saw you yesterday. You'd never get home till near midnight.'

'Will you take me?' asked Paul. 'I shall be frightened by myself if it gets any darker. P'raps you are going to walk into the City again to-night. Take me with you, if you are; then I shall see how you get that money, and I'll be able to tell Charlie.'

'Don't you be so curious about money,' said the man. 'It isn't at all a good thing to think about, and——'

But here Paul interrupted, for an idea had suddenly occurred to him.

'Oh!' he cried with great eagerness, 'I had forgotten!—I had quite forgotten! Oh, dear!—how could I!'

'You had forgotten what?' asked the man.

'My dad!' cried Paul; 'you were going to look for him, you know. Did you see him? When you walked into the City, did you meet my dad?'

The man paused. He seemed all at once to have become lost in thought. Paul had to repeat his question twice before he succeeded in obtaining an answer. At last it came.

'Yes, Paul,' replied the man, after clearing his throat two or three times. 'Yes, Paul, I was just going to tell you about it. I believe I did meet him.'

'What!' shrieked the child, his eyes sparkling and his cheeks glowing with the crimson of intense excitement; '*you met my dad?*'

'Yes, Paul, I think I did.'

The wonderful news was too great for Paul. It was some moments before he could find his voice.

'Oh, my dear, dear dad!' he then cried, his eyes moist and his rosy lips trembling. 'What did he look like? Is he very big?'

'I don't know that there is a lamp-post in this whole City that he couldn't touch the top of,' replied the man.

Paul clapped his hands for joy. 'And is he very strong?' he gasped.

'He could take any dozen chaps, such as we know, by the neck, and throw them right over the church steeple.'

Paul shouted with delight. 'And has he beautiful whiskers?' he almost shrieked.

'He could brush his hat with them,' was the answer. 'He is just the very splendoriest, loveliest man that any fellow could have for a dad. Now are you satisfied?'

Paul was more than satisfied. He was brimming over with joy, and thankfulness, and pride. What would Billy, and Robbie, and all of them say when they saw him walk up the court with such a dad? Oh, what triumph he would have! Who would be able to show a dad like his?

'When is he coming home?' he asked, quivering with the excess of his emotion. But the answer somewhat sobered him.

'Well, you see, Paul,' said the man, after some slight hesitation, 'that is just what I was going to talk to you about.'

'Going to talk about!' repeated Paul. 'Then isn't he coming?'

Again the man hesitated. 'I don't think he is, just yet,' he at length replied. 'You see, I am sure he is just breaking his heart for a sight of you, but——'

'Then why doesn't he come?' interrupted Paul. 'Why has he been away all this long, long time; and why doesn't he come to me quick?'

'I can't say why he has been away so long,' was the answer; 'but p'r'aps the reason that he couldn't come to you

quick, was that he couldn't stay here. He had to go off on a journey, and no doubt—why, what's the matter?

The disappointment was too much for Paul. He had stuck his knuckles into his eyes and burst into a torrent of tears.

'I shan't see him after all!' he wailed.

'Oh yes, you will,' hastily exclaimed the man. 'Come, don't cry. You will see him right enough, that is, if you are agreeable. Here, wipe your eyes and listen. Didn't I tell you that I thought your dad had to go off on a journey? Well, I am going on a journey too, and——'

'I don't know what a journey is,' sobbed Paul impatiently; 'and I don't know what you mean.'

'Well, I just mean that I am going straight off to-night to the very place where perhaps your dad is, and if you like I will take you with me, and that's all about it.'

Paul stopped crying. 'What!' he exclaimed; 'you will take me to my dear dad?'

'That is just what I'll try to do,' said the man, 'if you'll come with me. I'll try my best to put you *right into your dad's arms*. There! I can't promise you any more.'

Paul was ready to shout with joy. What! to be placed in the arms of his greatly longed-for dad! to be able to throw his arms round his neck! to look into his face! to hear his voice! It seemed too good to be true. Granny, Charlie, Susie, all were forgotten in the ecstasy of wild delight that thrilled through every vein in his body, as he repeated the words again and again. Even the bunch of buttercups and daisies fell to the ground unheeded.

'In his arms! in his arms!' he shouted; 'in my dear dad's arms! Oh, let us go!'

'That we will,' replied the man quietly, and taking up his stick, and a small bundle that lay on the seat beside him, he took Paul's little hand in his, and they left the park together.

Through the darkening streets they hurried along, Paul running, for the big man seemed to have forgotten how very low down was the little head at his side, and what an effort the small feet were making to keep up with his long strides. Only when Paul stood still and cried out: 'I'm so tired,' did he wake up suddenly from the absent reverie into which he seemed to have fallen, and stooping down raised the child in his arms. Paul was indeed feeling very tired. He had

walked a great deal that day, and the excitement of hearing definite news of his much-pondered-over father, had completed his weariness. Now, as he felt himself resting in the strong grasp of his new and strange friend, he drew a sigh of satisfaction, and nestling comfortably down, gave himself up to bright dreams of coming happiness. He had neither a fear nor a regret. All remembrance of his little blind play-fellow was left with the already dying bunch of buttercups and daisies. Brave, loving Charlie and faithful old granny were alike forgotten as he pondered over all the joy that would be his, when the sweet promise was realized and he found himself in his dear dad's arms. Some fifteen minutes passed before he spoke, then it was to say: 'I like you,' and he stroked the man's rough cheek as he said this.

'You are taking me to my dear dad. You are right good, and I like you very much. But who are you? What is your name? You haven't told me yet.'

'My name,' replied the man. 'Oh, I don't know. Let me see now. Why, I don't believe I've got a name.'

'Haven't you?' said Paul. 'Then what must I call you?'

'Ay, to be sure,' cried the man; 'you must call me *something*, of course. Now, what shall it be? Call me, call me; yes, that will do nicely. Call me Uncle Bill, old fellow; my name is Uncle Bill.'

'Uncle Bill,' repeated Paul, who heard the word 'uncle' for the first time. 'That is a funny name. Well, Uncle Bill, I've been thinking, and do you know what I am going to do with my half-crown?'

'Spend it in toffee,' suggested Uncle Bill.

'No,' said Paul, 'I am going to keep it for a present for my dear dad. I ought to have something to give him when I see him, and the half-crown will just do. Shall we see him to-night?'

'No, Paul, we can't see him to-night. I am afraid he is a long way off, you know; but we will go to him as quick as we can.'

Paul drew a little sigh on hearing this, and continued his dreaming. Meanwhile Uncle Bill was walking quickly along.

'I'm sleepy,' said Paul presently, glancing up from under his fast-closing eyelids.

Uncle Bill settled him more comfortably in his arms. 'Go to sleep, old chap,' he said ; 'you're all right.' And Paul remembered no more.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

'His flesh shall be fresher than a child's : he shall return to the days of his youth : he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him.'—JOB xxxiii. 25, 26.

WHEN Paul awoke the following morning, he found himself in a bed in a strange room. Some one had pulled off his jacket and boots the night before, for he could see them lying on the floor. Who could it have been? Not granny or Charlie. They would have undressed him altogether, and put on his little night-dress before they laid him to rest. He sat up and looked around, wondering greatly what could have happened ; and then one by one he remembered the events of the preceding evening, and with them arose a great fear in his breast. He was quite alone in this strange room. Where, then, was Uncle Bill—his new friend? Had he forgotten him, and gone away and left him all by himself? If so, how was he to get to his dad? His heart beating quickly, he sprang to the door, ran through a narrow passage, and, pausing at the top of a flight of steep stairs, called, as loud as he could : 'Uncle Bill !'

What a relief it was to him when the man's towering form immediately appeared at the bottom of the stairs, and his gruff but cheerful voice replied :

'Hallo, Paul ! So you're awake at last, are you? Come on down. I've been waiting for you this two hours.'

'I must put on my boots and jacket first,' replied Paul ; and so saying he returned to the bedroom.

Uncle Bill waited for him, whistling carelessly to pass the time ; but when some few minutes had gone by without the little fellow again making his appearance, he ran lightly up the stair to see what he was doing. At the door of the bedroom he paused, for a sight met his view that brought a flush to his cheek and an uncomfortable feeling to his breast. Paul was kneeling by the side of his bed. His eyes were

closed, his hands were clasped, and his rosy lips were murmuring some simple words of prayer—learned from blind Susie.

Like a flash rolled back the years of manhood and youth from the pages of Uncle Bill's memory; and, far away in the vistas of the past, he saw himself, as small, as simple-minded, as innocent of evil, as the little fellow before him, breathing the prayer of infant faith and adoration. He had travelled far along the stony road of life since those days, and now it suddenly dawned upon him that he had left something behind, besides the freshness and brightness of childhood, that he had better have brought along with him. A look of great pain settled upon his bronzed features. He had discovered that he had lost something—dropped it unconsciously by the roadside—and had continued his way unaware of his loss. Looking on that picture of childish holiness, he knew what it was. He knew what he had lost. It had dawned upon him how inestimably great was the value of what he had carelessly let fall. Strange that he had never thought of it before. He did not like to think of it now. He would like to have driven it from his mind. He would liked to have turned away from that kneeling little figure and gone whistling downstairs, but something seemed to prevent him; so he remained hesitating and embarrassed, and before he could make up his mind what to do, Paul stood before him.

'I was just saying my prayer,' he explained, as they left the room hand in hand. 'I suppose you said yours when you got up?'

'Yes,' replied Uncle Bill; 'oh yes!' but he uttered the falsehood sheepishly, and he hastened to change the conversation.

Then they entered a dark, dusty room, the floor of which was strewn with the ash of tobacco, broken pipes, etc., and marked with the stains of spilt liquor, and thick with the mud from heavy boots that had trudged many a mile.

'What house is this?' asked Paul. 'Are we going to see my dad here?'

'Oh no!' replied Uncle Bill. 'Your dad must be a long way from here. This is the house where we slept. We had to sleep somewhere, you know.'



'It is a very nasty house,' said Paul; 'and how it smells! Let us go out. I don't like it.'

Uncle Bill threw open the window, and a stream of fresh morning air flowed in that promised soon to chase away the fumes of smoke and drink that Paul found so disagreeable.

'Aren't you hungry?' he asked, as he did so.

'Yes,' replied Paul; 'let's get our breakfast. And then we will set off quick to find my dad, won't we?'

'We will so,' said Uncle Bill.

'Shall we get to him to-night?' asked Paul anxiously.

'Oh no; not by to-night. We couldn't do that, for I believe he is a long way off.'

'By to-morrow, then?' said Paul.

'No, not by to-morrow. He must be a *very* long way off.'

'By the day after that, then?' persisted Paul.

'Well, p'raps; but I can't say exactly.'

'We will get to him *some day*, though?' cried Paul.

'Oh, yes; I hope we shall.'

'And soon, Uncle Bill?'

'Yes, p'raps soon.'

Paul was satisfied then, and began to drink the cup of milk and to eat the bread-and-butter that had been set before him on the dusty wooden table. They were seated in what was called the bar-parlour of a small wayside inn. Cleaning time was not yet arrived, and very uncomfortably dirty everything looked. Paul was not sorry when, half an hour later, they left it, and began their journey in earnest; Uncle Bill carrying his bundle and stick, and Paul trotting merrily by his side. The morning was beautifully bright, the air fresh and clear, and the spirits of both rose as they walked along. Paul's face was glowing like a June rose, and a healthy flush was kindling upon Uncle Bill's bronzed cheeks.

'How far are we from home?' asked the little fellow presently.

'Oh, a long way,' replied Uncle Bill. 'You fell asleep last night, and didn't know how many miles I carried you. Why, it was early morning when we knocked the people up at the bit of an inn to give us a bed!'

Paul's bright face clouded.

'How shall we get back?' he asked.

'You don't want to get back, do you?' was Uncle Bill's reply.

'No,' cried Paul, recovering his cheerfulness, 'not till we have found my dad. What would be the use? But when we *have* found him, we will take him home with us, won't we? My! won't Charlie and granny just wonder! And won't Billy, and Jack, and Robbie, and all of them, just stare! Oh, wait a bit, Uncle Bill; my half-crown! Let me see if it is safe!'

Uncle Bill waited while the boy searched in his little pockets for the coin in question. When he found it, he held it up, crying joyfully:

'Here it is! I was afraid I had lost it!'

Uncle Bill put his hand in his pocket and drew out some pieces of silver, from which he selected a half-crown that had a hole through it, remarking:

'You *will* lose it, Paul, if you keep it loose in your pocket. See, give it to me, and I will give you this one instead. We can put a piece of string through the hole, and tie it round your neck, then it will be quite safe.'

'That will be splendid!' said Paul, making the exchange; and when the piece of money had been tied round his neck as Uncle Bill had suggested, and put out of sight under his little blue shirt, the two continued their way.

They soon left the village where they had spent the night far behind them, and city-bred Paul, accustomed only to built-up streets and narrow courts, began to observe the novelty of his surroundings.

'This is a beautiful place,' he remarked by-and-by. 'Why, it is like the park something; only quite different.'

Uncle Bill stooped down and lifted him up, that he might peep over the hedge at the miles of pasture and cultivated land that stretched on all sides as far as the eye could reach; and Paul, who was thoroughly capable of appreciating the many beauties of nature's green robes, sighed beneath the weight of his satisfaction.

He had a pleasant time running hither and thither, constantly spying out some new beauty, or exulting over some rare prize pillaged from hedge or stream. Then the sun shone with its noonday heat, and he was glad to be raised in Uncle Bill's strong arms and lay his curly head against his kind shoulder and fall fast asleep. When he awoke the afternoon was far advanced. He found himself lying on a

bank in the shade of a blackberry-bush white with blossom, and Uncle Bill was at his side with some food all ready for him to eat, and a baby-lark in his hand for him to admire and wonder over.

‘I caught it by yonder tree,’ he explained; ‘it’s just learning to fly. P’raps it’s out for the first time. Its nest will be in the cornfield there, and I guess that is its mammy chirping and fluttering around us.’

Paul watched the disconsolate bird, that was calling incessantly and flying quite close to them, for a few moments in silence. Then he said:

‘She thinks we’re going to keep her little one; but we won’t, will we, Uncle Bill?’

‘It would only die if we did,’ was the reply; ‘so we’ll let it go when you’ve had a good look at it.’

Half an hour later they were again on their way, and in the evening Uncle Bill found a cheap lodging to pass the night. Paul was tired out, and went to rest pretty early; but when the bright moon and the stars were shining, and Uncle Bill was about to throw himself down by his side, he awoke and sat up.

‘Is it morning?’ he asked.

‘No, Paul; it’s night—quite the middle of the night. I’m coming to bed.’

‘Oh,’ said Paul; and he lay down again. But though he yawned once or twice, his brown eyes were wide open, showing that he was fully awake. So, indeed, he was; for when Uncle Bill suddenly put out the light and lay down beside him, he sprang up.

‘Oh, Uncle Bill,’ he cried, ‘you didn’t say your prayer!’

It was quite dark, so Uncle Bill could blush as much as he chose; and blush he did.

‘I quite forgot it,’ he replied, after an awkward silence.

Paul was too much in earnest to notice the embarrassment of his tone.

‘What a good thing I reminded you,’ he said. ‘Why, the Lord might have thought He’d just forget to take care of you, as you had forgot to ask Him. I expect He’s waiting for your prayer. Get up, quick, Uncle Bill, and say it, for fear He goes away angry and leaves us.’

And before Uncle Bill knew where he was, he found him-

self out of bed and on his knees. Then he paused. What was he to do next? Speak?—To whom? To God?—What had he to say to the great God? Years of carelessness, of cold indifference, of wilful neglect, separated him from his Creator. He felt he was a stranger, a perfect stranger, to Him. He felt he had no business to be kneeling there; for he *did* feel that he was in His presence. Yes; he felt, after years of wandering, that he was at the footstool of his God. How he would have rejoiced if he had known that, in the bringing of this great truth home to him, the good work that little Paul had been singled out to accomplish in his careless heart was begun, and well begun. But he did not know it, and he bowed his head in shame.

‘Uncle Bill,’ whispered Paul’s little voice presently.

‘Yes, old fellow.’

‘I’m only thinking what a long prayer yours is. Have you said it now?’

A reply in the affirmative rose to Uncle Bill’s lips; but he checked it in time. He could not utter a falsehood there—on his knees.

‘I’d like to say a prayer for *you*, Paul,’ he said instead. ‘What shall it be?’

‘But I said mine,’ cried Paul.

‘I know that; but I would like to say another for you.’

‘But will the Lord hear it?’

‘Oh yes! They used to tell me at Sunday-school that He likes us to pray for each other.’

‘Did they?’ cried Paul. ‘Ah, I know what you are giving such a big sigh for. You are thinking what a lot of dear folks you’ve got to pray for; ain’t you? That will be what makes your prayer so long.’

And then a bright tear gathered in Uncle Bill’s grey eye and fell down upon his clasped hands; but, screened by the darkness, it passed unnoticed.

‘Go on,’ he said quietly; ‘tell me what I am to say for *you*.’

Paul considered a moment. Then he replied:

‘Say, “Dear Lord, please bless Paul; bless him as much as ever you can.” You can’t say anything better than that. “Bless” means everything good; Susie told me so.’

And the few simple words were said, and said earnestly and reverently.

'I guess we are all right now,' observed Paul, as they once more settled themselves to rest; 'but I had better look out and remind you every night and morning about your prayer, for fear you forget it again—hadn't I, Uncle Bill?'

Paul was drowsy now, too drowsy to notice that he received no answer to this question. His eyes were closed, and very soon he was once more fast asleep. But not so Uncle Bill. An hour passed, and still he was lying wide awake, thinking and pondering.

*'You are thinking what a lot of dear folks you've got to pray for.'*

Those words were ringing in his ears, bringing with them a train of regrets and self-accusations. He seemed to live his life—his careless, God-forgetting life—over again, as he lay there watching the quiet moonbeam creeping up the opposite wall, and listening to the sounds of Paul's lightly-drawn breath; and he saw where he had erred, and regret gave way to penitence, for in the end he once more crept softly from Paul's side, and with bended knee and bowed head poured forth the earnest prayer of heartfelt repentance and supplication for pardon and mercy. Nor did he ever return to the terrible state of those who let day after day slip by without presenting themselves at the throne of grace. Even had he been so inclined, while Paul was with him it would have been impossible; for the boy's daily question, 'You didn't forget your prayer, and the one for me, did you, Uncle Bill?' had to be answered; and how could he answer it except with a truthful, 'No, Paul; I did not?'

They were a strange pair as they trudged along—the big strong man and the small helpless child. The one with his rugged, careworn brow, his great worldly experience, his knowledge of evil and suffering; the other with his fair smooth face, his candid, trusting eyes, and his great ignorance and simplicity—a strange companion this for Uncle Bill, whose life had been passed amid such rough scenes. Perhaps it was the consciousness of the great difference existing between them, in mind as well as in body, that made his gruff voice so gentle and his hands so tender; perhaps it was the novelty of having so strange a friend as a child-friend, so strange a companion as a child-companion; perhaps he valued the many lessons he drew from the little songs of praise he con-

stantly heard from Paul's lips, and the many quaint remarks in which his childish faith in divine protection, and appreciation of divine love (the result of the blind child's teaching), were so touchingly expressed ; or perhaps he had never before experienced the charm of having something small and weak wholly dependent upon his superior strength and forethought, and liked it. One thing was certain. The boy had evidently some strong fascination for him, for his eyes were constantly upon him. His one desire seemed to be to minister to his comfort, and when he spoke his voice was softened to such an extent that he himself hardly recognised it. And, as time went on, the amused interest that had at first attracted him to the little fellow, strengthened to pure affection.

Standing alone, as he felt he did, in the wide world, with no one to care if he never awoke from his rude couch, a tramp, a vagabond, a homeless outcast in his native land, he found it very sweet to feel that little hand laid so confidently in his, and to respond to that prattling voice, ever seeking the aid of his superior strength and judgment. Soon, that Paul should return his affection, became his chief care. For this reason he discouraged him from talking of those he had left behind in his City home, and sought to keep his mind from dwelling on the past, by occupying it entirely with the present.

He succeeded in keeping him so thoroughly contented and happy, that no regretful thoughts turned either to poor little blind Susie, nor yet to Charlie and his old granny. When he *did* mention them, it was only to say, 'Won't I have a lot to tell Susie when we go back !' or if his admiration were unusually excited by anything they passed on their way, he would perhaps cry, 'Oh, Uncle Bill, I do wish Charlie was here to see that !' No, Paul had no regrets for the friends who were even now sorrowing so truly for him. Uncle Bill had no cause to be jealous of those who were yet seeking wildly and inconsolably tidings of the lost child. But there was one person of whom he was genuinely jealous. This was Paul's dad.

It is needless to remark that he knew nothing whatever of the little fellow's father. The evening he had met the child in the park, he had conjured up the story of having met his

father in the City merely to give him a motive for accompanying him quietly and willingly. About to set out on a long journey, and feeling his loneliness more acutely than ever he had felt it before, he had suddenly conceived the idea that it would be pleasant to have this little prattling companion trotting by his side ; added to which was the fact that the boy had, as it were, claimed his protection. He had hardly cared to alter his plans by seeing him safely to his home, and he was unwilling to let him go by himself ; for he thought the distance very great for such small legs, and the streets very dark for such young eyes.

As to his friends, they deserved to lose him, so he said to himself, for being so careless as to let him wander so far all alone. And he meant to bring him back. Oh yes ! he had no idea of stealing him. He would be returning to the City in a month or two, and of course he would bring the boy with him, and restore him to his home. But since that evening Uncle Bill had quite altered his mind. Bright, winning, loving little Paul had grown even in those few short weeks to fill a big gap in his heart and life. He felt he would be lonelier than ever if he lost him ; and he therefore resolved that he never would lose him.

The child had neither father nor mother. Only a 'granny'—'a very old granny' as Paul constantly affirmed—and a 'Charlie,' who was not his brother, nor his uncle, nor his cousin, nor anything else so far as Uncle Bill could discover. He could do a great deal better for him than any 'very old granny,' and he had quite as much right to him as any 'Charlie.' And so he determined that he would keep him—keep him as a bright little sunbeam that kind Heaven had sent to lighten up his dark life—keep him, and do well for him. And there was another thing that he was determined about, too. What was memory at Paul's age ? As uncertain as the wind. Uncle Bill resolved that he should forget, entirely and completely forget, all he had left behind him in the past, and that his present and his future should be for him alone : all the affection of his young heart should be his. There should be no regretful straying to other friends even in thought. And as the bright days of early autumn passed slowly by, this desire seemed in a fair way to be fulfilled. Paul spoke less and less of those he had loved so

truly in his old home. It might be that, for the time at all events, he was forgetting them.

But there was one person whom, in spite of all Uncle Bill's endeavours, he *would not* forget. There was one person whom he *would* talk about. There was one person whom he *would* look forward to seeing as the happiest, proudest moment of his life. This was his dad. Uncle Bill began to get troubled about the persistency with which the little fellow clung to the idea that every day took him nearer to his 'dear daddy,' as he called him. He dare not confess that he was as ignorant as himself as to where his father might be; for so hopeful and eager was Paul upon this subject, that his kind heart shrank from telling him the truth, and witnessing the disappointment and grief that he knew would follow. The boy's daily question, 'Shall we see my dear dad to-day, Uncle Bill?' became more and more painful as his affection for him increased. 'If he would only forget this precious dad of his!' he thought from time to time. But Paul would not forget.

At last a bright idea occurred to Uncle Bill. 'It is that half-crown that does it,' he said to himself triumphantly. 'Of course as long as he wears the thing round his neck, and keeps on fingering it, and wondering what his dad will buy with it, he is certain to be thinking of the fellow.'

So one night when Paul was fast asleep, he softly untied the string, and put the half-crown in his pocket. But in the morning the wail from those little lips, the tears in those dark eyes, the piteous, 'Oh, Uncle Bill, what shall I do! I have nothing to give my dear dad now!' was too much for Uncle Bill.

Flushing crimson, he searched the bed in which they had been sleeping, and pretended to find the treasured coin. Then he tied it once more round the boy's neck; and as he listened to his profuse thanks, made up his mind 'not to try that dodge on again.'

A week later, feeling that something must be done to destroy this cherished day-dream, he ventured to remark:

'I was just wondering, Paul, if that dad of yours could have somehow happened to have missed us, you know.'

Paul's big eyes opened inquiringly. His little face looked anxious.



'I mean,' continued Uncle Bill (feeling his way carefully) 'if we shouldn't happen to meet him, you know.'

Paul's expression of anxiety changed to great dismay, and his lips began to quiver threateningly.

'I don't mean we shan't,' hastily cried Uncle Bill; 'in fact, we shall—oh yes, of course we shall. There, old chap—don't cry—come, don't cry. We'll come across him soon, right enough; of course we shall.'

'Then what did you say we shouldn't for?' asked Paul reproachfully, wiping the glistening tears from his eyes.

'I was only teasing you a bit, old chap.'

'But you shouldn't tease, Uncle Bill.'

'No,' replied Uncle Bill humbly; 'I shouldn't.'

Another day he tried again. Paul had been talking of his dad for some time—what he would be like, etc.

'Suppose he should happen to be something like me,' observed Uncle Bill quietly; 'would you be about satisfied, old fellow?'

'Oh dear!' cried Paul; 'he will be a deal finer than you—a great deal finer!'

Uncle Bill felt a sudden decrease in his height, and found himself wondering if he were really "six feet one in his stockings."

'I don't think he will be bigger than me, anyhow,' he remarked apologetically.

Paul glanced at the towering form beside him, and replied, in a tone of condescension:

'Well, p'raps not.'

'Nor stronger, Paul. I'm *very* strong.'

'Y—yes,' hesitated Paul; 'I think you are.'

'And I have a fair show of whiskers,' he added, remembering in what high estimation the little fellow held such adornments of the face of manhood.

'Well, they are not bad,' replied Paul encouragingly.

'And I used to be reckoned good-looking, Paul.'

Uncle Bill's voice as he uttered these last words bore a melancholy pathos that Paul was not slow to notice. He looked up hastily into his face (they were resting upon a bank by the wayside at the time).

Presently the sound of a sigh fell upon his ear; a sigh so heavy and long that it seemed to lift every bone of Uncle

Bill's broad chest. Paul could not stand that. Throwing his little arms round his neck, he whispered contritely :

'I haven't said anything to make you feel sorry, have I, Uncle Bill ?'

'No, love, no.'

Paul's glance was still full of anxiety.

'You are sad,' he remarked.

'Not I !' replied Uncle Bill, with a light laugh.

'But you are *often* sad,' persisted Paul ; '*very* often.' And I always know when you are, though I don't say anything. It is when you sit for a long time without speaking ; and though your eyes are wide open, I never can quite make out what you are looking at. Then I know that you are thinking about something that makes you sad. What is it, Uncle Bill ?'

It suddenly occurred to Uncle Bill that he could turn this question to advantage. Laying his hand upon the boy's curly black head, he replied :

'Well, I won't deny that I am a bit sad now and then, Paul. It is mostly when I get thinking that very soon I shall be losing you.'

'Losing me ?' repeated Paul, puzzled as to the meaning of these words.

'Yes ; when we get to your dad, you know. Won't he be taking you away from me ?'

'Oh, to be sure,' cried the child ; 'of course he will !' And then seeing a look of disappointment settle upon Uncle Bill's kind face, he observed reprovingly : 'You shouldn't be sad about that, Uncle Bill ; it is silly. Why, I *must* go to my dear dad. I couldn't stay away from *him*.'

'I don't see at all why you are hankering so much after this dad of yours,' exclaimed Uncle Bill, determined for once to come boldly to the point. 'You have got *me*, and you allow that I am big, and strong, and good-looking—eh, Paul ? What more do you want ?'

'Nothing,' replied Paul ; 'but you are only Uncle Bill ; and,' he added, recalling to mind Robbie's words that memorable Sunday, 'a fellow ought to have a dad.'

Uncle Bill gave the matter up then, and from that day sought to avoid the subject altogether, only replying to Paul's frequent, 'I suppose we shall be getting to my dear dad

pretty soon now, Uncle Bill?' by a simple, 'Oh yes,' and an endeavour to change the conversation as soon as possible.

The days passed happily by. Many a pleasant chat had they as they strolled along. If Paul could prattle little stories that, somehow, Uncle Bill never wearied of listening to, Uncle Bill had many a tale that Paul thought wonderfully interesting. There was one of a burning ship, and of great perils on the sea, that was his especial favourite. He liked best to hear it when dusk was gathering and the night-breeze commencing its song in the woods around. Then he would slip his little hand into Uncle Bill's, and whisper: 'Tell me about how the wind roared when the flames, all hot and red, flew round the ship, Uncle Bill.' And Uncle Bill never said 'No.'

They were journeying very slowly. 'Why don't we get into a train?' Paul would often ask as they stood and watched the puffing engine and its long string of carriages fly across the country. 'Haven't you money enough?' And Uncle Bill would answer: 'P'raps I've money enough, and to spare; but I'm in no hurry to get to the end of this journey, so we'll walk all the way.' 'Why aren't you in a hurry, Uncle Bill?' And Uncle Bill would hesitate and sigh before he replied: 'Maybe for what I'll find when the end *does* come; and maybe for what I *won't* find.' And he would prevent any of Paul's usual pondering over this strange answer by directing his attention to something else.

Uncle Bill was not short of money; that is, of course, for one of his class. Many a day's work did he get on neighbouring farms as they passed along; and now and then they remained two, and even three, days in the villages and small towns they had to travel through that he might have an opportunity of filling his pockets with the gains of honest labour. 'What do you want so much money for?' Paul had once inquired, as he watched him count a fair number of silver and copper coins. And he had been answered: 'We want money for a great many things, old fellow. We are spending some every day as we go along; and I must have a pound or two in my pocket when we get to——' 'To where?' asked Paul, as the other hesitated, and finally stopped. 'To your dad,' replied Uncle Bill quietly; 'p'raps he'll have no money, and will want us to give him some.'

It was after this that Paul's half-crown became so precious to him. At first he had treasured it as a gift for his father, but now he looked upon it (and it was an immense fortune in his eyes) as something that his 'dear dad' was actually in need of, and would receive with joy. Accordingly, its value was increased a thousand-fold.

But although by such means Uncle Bill's pockets were kept far from empty, he seemed to think twice before he drew one halfpenny from them. He took care that Paul had all that was necessary to keep him in perfect health; but for himself, many and many a day his only meal was a cob of dry bread, and his only drink a draught of crystal water. He was treasuring up his money for *some one*, that was very certain. Perhaps it was for the same reason that during the hot weather he avoided the haunts where for a trifling sum they could have slept, at all events, upon a bed of some sort, and would seek refuge instead in a barn, or an out-house, or perhaps in some shed—any shelter so that Paul could rest in safety, and he himself be able to add a little more to his treasured store. He might, indeed, have had a still stronger reason than this for seeking such Bohemian lodgings. In the small, low inns frequented by men of his social rank, Paul might have heard and seen much that would have been terribly unsuited to the eyes and ears of infancy. Who knew this better than Uncle Bill? And he wasn't going to have that little face robbed of its great charm of innocence and simplicity; he wasn't going to have Paul's sweetness marred. He was his pure white blossom, his opening bud, his one little pet Snowdrop. He always called him 'Snowdrop' in his tender moods. His Snowdrop must not be stained. No breath of defilement must hover near it that he could keep away. As he had gathered it by the wayside, fresh and beautiful, so it must be his care and pride to keep it.

Thus it was that as bright days came and went, the lanes and the woods were their only home. And a wonderful and beautiful home Paul found them. How merrily he trotted along by Uncle Bill's side, stopping here and there to fill his little hands with the wild flowers; for flowers had an irresistible fascination for Paul; pass one, he could not. His small fingers were a veritable sword of execution to every

bright blossom that fell under the glance of his sparkling eyes. And oh, how those same eyes glistened when they spied out a treasure of extra beauty! No bride ever exulted over her casket of gems, as he did over the towering fox-glove, the vivid poppy, the purple corn-cockle, or it might be over a bed of golden trefoil, or a cluster of blue forget-me-nots. These were all gathered, and treasured for 'dear dad,' in case they should happen to come across him that day. And when they, one by one, pined and died in his hot little hands, they were only flung aside to make room for fresher, perhaps rarer beauties.

There was one flower that Paul was always looking for, but that he never could find. This was the Snowdrop.

'What is a Snowdrop, Uncle Bill?' he had asked the first time he had been called by this fanciful name.

And he had been answered: 'A Snowdrop, Paul, is just the prettiest, bravest bit of a flower that grows; leastways, I think so. It is out smiling as hard as it can, when the rest of the posies are all snugly asleep. I've gathered it many a time when there has been nothing but snow all around me, and when the very ripples on the streams were frozen into standing still; and yet there that bit of a snowdrop would peep its tiny head out with all the impudence in the world, white, and fresh, and bright; as if it was asking the dreary winter what he meant by knocking about at that time of the year, and calling on the spring to be hurrying up with his green leaves and his sunshine, and not be lagging behind like a lazy lie-a-bed. That is what the snowdrop does, Paul. And the best of it is, it makes old winter mind it, strong and sharp as he is. Away he goes and takes everything bare, and cold, and desolate, with him; and up scuddles the spring, and all gets bright and beautiful in no time.'

'And what does the dear little snowdrop do then?' asked Paul, who was highly interested.

'What does it do then—when it has driven winter away and made the spring come?' replied Uncle Bill. 'Oh, its work is over then, Paul—so it dies!'

'Dies?' repeated Paul, in a tone of great disappointment.

'No, lad, no,' hastily explained Uncle Bill, for no cloud ever rested upon that little face that he could drive away, 'I mean it goes to sleep; because you see the summer might

get *too* bright for it, and spoil it; so it goes to sleep; and awakes the next year as beautiful as ever.'

Paul brightened.

'I'm very glad it doesn't die,' he said. 'What a good little flower it is! I should like to see one, Uncle Bill. Let us look if we can't find one. Where do they grow?'

'They spring up in the fields, or out of the hedges, or about the woods, here, there, and everywhere,' replied Uncle Bill. 'But they all go to sleep long before the roses and the butterflies come; so there is no use of looking for them now.'

'But p'raps they don't *all* go to sleep, Uncle Bill?'

'I'm thinking they do, old chap.'

'But there might be *one* awake, just *one*, Uncle Bill?'

'Well, there *might*, certainly, though I can't say it's likely,' replied Uncle Bill, hesitatingly.

'Still there *might*,' persisted Paul; 'anyhow we will look, won't we? because I think my dear dad would like to see a snowdrop.'

That was the beginning of Paul's gathering every white flower that came in his path, and running with it to Uncle Bill to know if it were a snowdrop.

'Ah, well!' he would say, when the invariable answer, 'No, Paul, I can't say that it is,' was given, 'p'raps we shall find one yet. But even if we don't, we are sure to get lots when they all wake up again after the winter, won't we, Uncle Bill? unless we happen to come across my dear dad before then, and he takes us back home.'

'Will you like to go back home with him, Paul?' Uncle Bill asked on one occasion.

'I must go wherever he wants to take me,' replied the boy instantly. 'Lads always do as their dads want them.'

'But I mean will you be glad to leave all the trees, and flowers, and fields, that you are so fond of, and go home to the streets again, where there is nothing pretty at all.'

'Oh yes!' was the ready reply. 'I won't mind the streets, because I shall be so glad to see Susie, and Charlie, and granny. Won't they just stare to see me coming back with my dear dad, and to hear all I have seen while I've been looking for him! But we shall never be able to tell them properly, shall we, Uncle Bill? We shall never be able to make them understand how very beautiful everything is here?'

And as Uncle Bill glanced around, his heart echoed Paul's words. In spite of the uncertain result of this journey (for he was not tramping through county after county without having an especial object in view), in spite of anxious forebodings, of alternate fluttering hopes and dark fears, Uncle Bill was finding the world very beautiful just then—far more beautiful than he had ever imagined it to be. Perhaps this was because he was taking more notice of it, because his eyes were always hovering round in search of anything that might interest or amuse Paul, and were thus discovering beauty where he had never suspected it of lurking. At all events, he found plenty. It might be in a spray of honeysuckle from the hedge, in a bunch of blackberries from the banks of the stream, in a cluster of acorns from some spreading oak, in a tinted oak-apple, an opening chestnut-bur, or in a pine-cone tossed prematurely from the tall trees. How Paul's eyes would glisten when such rustic treasures were placed in his little hands! Or they would stand together and watch the squirrels bounding from branch to branch, a startled rabbit seeking refuge in the underwood, or a partridge rising with a loud 'whir,' almost from under their feet. Or he would call the boy's attention to the speckled breast of the thrush flitting between the bushes, and bid him listen while it paused on some high bough to pour from its swelling throat its rich, clear song. Or he would direct his little eyes to the black rooks as, with their mournful, 'Caw ! caw !' they sailed majestically across the open blue sky ; or it might be to the scarlet breast of the robin as with its tiny head aslant and its brown eyes sparkling with gem-like lustre, it ventured again and again within arm's reach, but was off like a thought as Paul stretched forth his hand to clutch it. Or they would sit side by side upon some high bank, and watch the sun gilding the rippling stream and early autumn foliage ; or shedding a flood of glory upon the sheaves of corn, and beautifying the coarse garments of the gleaners ; or setting, big and red, in a sea of crimson and gold, lending the earth his most brilliant rays, as though he were sorry that the hour had come when his good-night must be whispered, and was striving hard to leave his brightest impression of power and love behind him. Or the winged insects hovering around would invite their admiration. The butterflies with their

gaily-painted wings, the noisy bees with their little legs steeped in golden pollen stolen from fragrant blossoms, the dazzling fire-flies, the bronzed lady-bird, or the scarlet cow-lady. Or perhaps a prickly hedgehog would come in their way; a mole with his curious little feet and soft velvet coat; a tiny field-mouse; or even a bright-eyed frog. All these, and many other treasures of bank, hedge, stream, or wood, Uncle Bill had seen again and again; but never had he found them either beautiful or interesting until Paul's eager glance fell upon them, or his sweet childish voice welcomed them with shouts of delight.

Yes, Uncle Bill was beginning to find out that the world was very beautiful. Beautiful in the bright early morning when Paul trotted merrily by his side; beautiful towards midday when the boy, weary with running and prattling, would be on his back, the little arms round his neck, the tired feet round his waist, the curly head pillowed on his shoulder, and the dark eyes closed in sound slumber; beautiful when they would pause beside a flowing river, and refresh their dusty travel-stained limbs in the clear rippling water; beautiful when they left the wayside for the wood, and, under the shade of some spreading tree, would sit down amid moss and fern and eat the simple victuals purchased in the neighbouring village; beautiful, too, when money grew scarce, and Uncle Bill contrived to snare some luckless rabbit or bird, and divested it of fur, or feathers, and wrapped it round with clay and thrust it into a fire of brush-wood, and then sat down to smoke his pipe, while Paul strolled hither and thither collecting rustic fuel to keep the flames bright and red till the rude cooking would be over, and the savoury meat ready to moisten their hard crusts; beautiful in the evenings, when the sinking sun threw down his crimson glory, and the air trembled with the music of nature's minstrels, and the flowers closed their petals, and the butterflies folded their wings; beautiful, too, later on, when the shadows lengthened on their path, and the labourer's cheery 'Good-night' fell upon their ears, and the cattle settled themselves to rest in the surrounding pastures, and Paul asked again to be carried, and Uncle Bill began to search for some snug resting-place to pass the night; and lastly, beautiful—oh, very beautiful!—when Paul was fast



asleep, and Uncle Bill smoked his last pipe in the light of the pale silver moon, and the darkness gathered, and surrounding objects lost their distinctness and assumed weird-like outlines, and the twinkling stars studded the dark heavens!

It was in such moments as these that Uncle Bill first began to notice a great quiet stealing around him, that seemed to have fallen upon the earth with the dark veil of night; a great stillness and rest that the sun had left behind him when he stole away the light; a peace, a calm, a sweet repose in the whole of nature, the more strongly apparent because he felt that he, with all his doubts, and fears, and hopes, his longings, and plannings, and strivings, his resolving, his regretting, and his sinning, had no part in it whatever. He had never observed it before. His lot had been mostly cast with those who, with the clamour of riotous mirth, had striven to drown this sweet voice of nature's sleep; and so he had never listened to it. But he *did* listen to it now.

As he drew whiff after whiff from his short clay pipe, and glanced above at the clear, gentle light, and below at the shadows around him, he listened to the words of this whispering silence. Many a strange story it told him, many a softened look it brought to his sunburnt features, and many a tear it drew to his kind grey eye. And then it would lead his thoughts to the object of this journey, and a feverish restlessness would come upon him, and he would begin to consider what day it was, and whereabouts they were, and how far they had to travel still, and count on his fingers the days that must come and go before they reached the little village, and stood by the well-remembered cottage-door and saw—*ah, what?*

At this point of his reflections, Uncle Bill always drew a heavy sigh, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and, turning into the cottage, or barn, or outhouse, wherever they might be spending the night, would throw himself down by Paul's side and go to sleep.

## CHAPTER XVII.

‘What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?’—JOB ii. 10.

PAUL and Uncle Bill had been some two months on their journey, and now, this bright November afternoon, they stood on the borders of the county of Devonshire. They had journeyed easily, loitering hours here, and pausing days there, perhaps in consideration of Paul’s little feet—perhaps—but let Uncle Bill himself explain.

‘So, we are here at last, Snowdrop!’ he cried, sitting down upon the last step of the stile they had just got over; ‘we are here at last! Ay, many’s the time I’ve had this picture before me—many’s the time I’ve walked a good mile straight towards it, and many’s the time I’ve turned ten miles from it, dreading what I should see when I got to it, and wondering whatever put it into my head to come just to find out, maybe, that my very worst fear is true. Well, what’s the odds? I made up my mind to come, and here I am. And now, what are we to do next? I wish we were five hundred miles away, Snowdrop; for I daren’t go on. That’s the truth of the whole matter! *I daren’t go on!*’

Uncle Bill had been unusually silent for the last two hours, and this sudden outbreak, in language, too, so strange from the lips of a big strong man, caused Paul’s heart to beat a little quicker.

‘There must indeed be something dreadful about,’ he thought, ‘if Uncle Bill daren’t go on.’

‘What is it?’ he asked anxiously. ‘What are you afraid of, Uncle Bill?’

But Uncle Bill was not listening. He was sitting gazing absently upon the stubble-fields before him, and Paul had to repeat his question three or four times, and even pull his sleeve, before he could succeed in attracting his attention.

‘Ay!’ exclaimed Uncle Bill, when he at last did so. ‘Were you speaking, old fellow?’

‘Yes,’ replied Paul, ‘but you are so busy thinking to-day you don’t hear me. I only want to know what makes you afraid to go on.’

Uncle Bill's reply was to draw the boy on to his knee. Then, after a few moments' silence, and a long sigh, he pointed to the fields before him, and said :

'All the corn, the yellow waving corn, Snowdrop, that we have so often looked at, and said was so pretty, has gone. It has been all cut down and carried away. And the fields where it grew are bare and miserable. And the hedges that were so green a while back, look brown and sickly. And we might count the leaves upon the trees yonder. And look up at the sky! It is a hard grey. And the mist is gathering around us. It has hidden the hills from us already. And there is a lot of cold in the air, Snowdrop. And there is a lot of cold in my heart too, lad! And—*here we are.*'

'Uncle Bill, I don't know one bit what you are talking about,' said Paul, after pondering over this speech for a few seconds. 'What do you keep sighing for? And why do you look so very sad? And what are you frightened of? And what is this place that we've got to? Have you ever been here before? Is it where my dad is?'

'No, no, Paul; your dear dad is not here. We have not come to him yet. But I *have* been here before. I almost wish I hadn't. Ay, yes! I've been here before, Snowdrop; I've been here before.'

Uncle Bill sighed again, and he looked altogether so unhappy, and so hopeless, that Paul was quite distressed. Feeling it beyond his power to offer any consolation, he threw his arms round his neck, by way of expressing his entire sympathy with his sorrow, whatever it might be; and he remained silent. By-and-by Uncle Bill spoke again:

'Yes, Paul,' he said, like one awakening from a dream, 'I've been here before; not so very many years ago either. But the country around isn't the only thing that has quite changed since that day.'

'Has the country quite changed, Uncle Bill? That's odd. What has done it?'

'The same thing that changes us all for the worse,' replied Uncle Bill. 'The drawing to an end of bright happy days, and the coming on of a hard winter—a winter of blight, and disappointment, and—— But never mind all that, old fellow! There's many a summer's day in store for you, before you

begin to fret over the frost-bites of the winters I've seen. Look alive, and be merry while you may !'

'I am merry enough,' replied Paul ; 'but I want you to tell me how the country has changed since you were here before. I can't make it out.'

'It has only changed in a matter of season, Snowdrop ; that is all I meant. The sky wasn't cold and grey then, old chap ; it was warm and rosy with the glow of a summer's evening, and over yonder was a half-mown field, and the air was full of the scent of the hay ; and just before us was the wheat, with the poppies that you are so fond of, showing their red faces here and there ; and the woodlark was singing in that very oak by yon gate, and we thought we had never heard him sing so sweet. And yet we both noticed a kind of melancholy like in his pipe, too. Ay, yes ! there was something in that woodlark's song that made us both feel a bit sad. It might have been warning us—who knows ?'

'"Both," and "us," mean two people, don't they, Uncle Bill ?' asked Paul after a short pause, spent, on his part, in grave consideration.

'I believe so, old fellow.'

'Then some one was with you that day you heard the woodlark sing. Who was it ?'

'Who was it ?' repeated Uncle Bill, stroking the curly head gently as he spoke. 'Who was it ? Why, it was—it was—it was just a flower, old chap ; nothing more.'

'A *flower*, Uncle Bill !' cried Paul in astonishment.

'Ay,' replied Uncle Bill musingly, 'a flower—the prettiest, sweetest flower that ever grew—leastways, to *my* mind.'

'Was it a snowdrop ?' asked Paul eagerly.

'That is just what it was,' continued Uncle Bill, and there was a tear in his voice as well as in his eye as he spoke ; 'the brightest, tenderest-like snowdrop that ever blossomed. And *I* came across it.'

'And you gathered it, of course, Uncle Bill ?'

'Ay, lad ; I did. I gathered that snowdrop. It seemed to promise me such a sweet summer of content and happiness that I couldn't pass it by ; so I gathered it, and I took it off with me far away from the quiet green spot where it had bloomed.'

'And what became of it, Uncle Bill ?'

Uncle Bill heaved a long, deep sigh.

'Ay, lad,' he cried bitterly, 'that is the question. That is the question that's been haunting me these five years or more. *What became of it?* For I lost it, Paul. It wasn't my fault; but I lost it. And whether it died, or whether it came back here to the spot where it grew, and whether it is here still, or whether, thinking me lost for good, it has let some one else gather it—who can tell?'

Paul was very thoughtful after hearing these words. This snowdrop must be a wonderful flower, he thought. Uncle Bill spoke of it as if it were something alive, and he seemed so agitated the while that Paul was quite distressed. Yes, this snowdrop must be a wonderful flower. How he would like to see one! A sudden curiosity upon this point made him forget that he had been about to try and comfort poor Uncle Bill for the loss of his favourite flower, and he cried instead:

'Where did you find your snowdrop, Uncle Bill?'

Uncle Bill pointed with his finger:

'Along this path straight before us, old chap—the corn was waving on each side of it, much higher than your little head, *that* day—over the stile at the other side, down the lane to the right; that is where I found my snowdrop. Come, let us go on.'

'Yes, that is what I was going to say,' cried Paul gaily, as Uncle Bill rose, and, seizing his little hand, strode quickly across the bare fields towards the opposite stile, like a man who had at last made up his mind after much wavering. 'We will go to the very place where you found your snowdrop, and we will look well if we can't find another. I should so like to see one, and to have one to give to my dear dad when we come across him. And you know, Uncle Bill, all the flowers are dead now. There are none left; I never see *one*. If we don't find a snowdrop, I shall have nothing but my half-crown to give to him; so we will search very well, won't we?'

They were walking quickly along now. Paul had to run to keep up with Uncle Bill's long strides; but so anxious was he to begin the search for the wonderful snowdrop, that the quickness of their pace gave him great satisfaction. He broke away from Uncle Bill's hand when they were within a

few yards of the stile, and, with a merry shout, got over it unassisted, and scampered down a narrow lane lying right before him. A high hedge lay at each side of this lane, and Paul soon paused and began to search eagerly among the green weeds, growing about the roots, for the white blossoms he so desired to see. But alas ! nothing was there but burdock, and nettle, and thistle, and rush, and such-like adornments of hedge and ditch, brilliant indeed, not with white petals, but with glistening dewdrops that wetted his little fingers as he pushed them impatiently first to one side and then to the other. So several minutes passed ; then, being still unsuccessful in his search, he turned to ask for assistance. He had strayed meanwhile some little way down the lane, and looking back, he found to his surprise that Uncle Bill had not followed him, but that he was still standing by the stile, gazing fixedly at something over the hedge. He ran back to him.

‘I can’t find a snowdrop,’ he cried. ‘I can’t see anything white at all. Come and show me the *very* place where you found yours, Uncle Bill.’

But Uncle Bill was not attending. His eyes were riveted upon that something over the hedge, and there was such a look of breathless anxiety, almost of fear, upon his face, that Paul forgot all about his snowdrop, and asked, all tremblingly :

‘What is it, Uncle Bill ? What do you see over there ?’

The hand that clutched Paul’s was damp, and great drops of sweat stood out on Uncle Bill’s brow as he pointed with his finger, and replied hoarsely :

‘That chimney—yonder !’

‘Do you mean that one behind those trees over there ?’ asked Paul, after waiting a few seconds in vain for further explanation.

Uncle Bill made no answer. Paul looked up and followed the direction of his eyes. Yes, it was certainly the white stucco chimney, showing through the bare boughs of some trees standing about twenty yards behind the hedge, that was claiming all his attention.

‘It is only a cottage chimney, Uncle Bill, isn’t it ?’ said Paul presently.

‘Ay, ay, lad,’ replied Uncle Bill, wiping his brow with his

red handkerchief; 'but there should be smoke coming out of it—if all is right. It is near evening; won't the old man be wanting his cup of tea? Shouldn't *she* be getting it ready? What fire can there be without smoke? Oh, Snowdrop, Snowdrop, there should be smoke coming out of that chimney!'

Uncle Bill's tone was so inexpressibly hopeless and sad as he said this, that Paul's lip began to twitch nervously.

'Surely something dreadful was going to happen,' he thought, 'or Uncle Bill would never look so troubled. 'Don't cry,' he faltered; 'please don't cry, Uncle Bill! I shall be so frightened if you do! P'raps the chimney's broke; or p'raps the old man has had his tea. Didn't you say an old man lived there, Uncle Bill? P'raps he's had his tea and let the fire out.'

Two big tear-drops had gathered in Paul's brown eyes while he spoke; but, before they could overflow, Uncle Bill had wiped them away, and taking his little hand in his, had led him hurriedly down the lane. Only about thirty yards or so; then came a gate, a broken five-barred gate; and peeping through, Paul could see the white cottage standing a little way beyond, shut in by a tall holly hedge.

'There!' he cried triumphantly, 'I told you so. It *was* a cottage chimney, and there is the cottage. There is no smoke, to be sure; but what of that? All chimneys are not bound to smoke, are they?'

'I don't know,' replied Uncle Bill, the eager, anxious look returning to his face. 'Things *may* be right, but my mind misgives me. Look at the road there—the only road to the cottage gate—grass-grown, weeds near a yard high. If feet were going along it day after day, I'm thinking there should be some trace of them. There is a look about the whole place that bodes no good. There is something worse than the waste of autumn here; and the old man was such a one for keeping all trim, too. . . . Well, standing still will do no good, old chap! Let us get on.'

As he spoke he opened the gate, and they passed through. Then Uncle Bill appeared to waver. He advanced a few paces, then he stepped back; went on again, once more returned; and finally, leaning against the gate, took his red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face and head.

Then he drew a long sigh between his set teeth, and meeting Paul's anxious look, smiled—a grim, almost ghastly smile, and muttered:

‘I am as weak as a kitten, Snowdrop. It's mighty queer, but I *can't* get on.’

‘Why, you are tired, Uncle Bill,’ cried Paul, suddenly concluding, to his great relief, that such was the true state of the case. ‘You are tired, and no wonder. We have walked a great deal this last week, and you have had me on your back nearly the whole time too. Poor Uncle Bill! you are tired out. Sit down and rest on this big stone, and I'll run to the cottage for you. What is it you want? To know if an old man lives there? Tell me what kind of an old man he is, and I will go and see.’

Uncle Bill sat down mechanically upon the stone to which he had suffered the boy to lead him, and Paul continued:

‘There! lean back against the tree behind you, and I'll run and see about this old man. He will have white hair, won't he? All right, you just stay there and rest, and I'll find him out for you.’ And away he went.

Uncle Bill watched him run along the weed-grown track to the small garden-gate before the cottage. It must have been latched inside, or bolted, for after fumbling at it unsuccessfully for a moment or two, the boy climbed to the top, and waving his cap triumphantly to Uncle Bill, disappeared down the other side. Uncle Bill, who had been watching his movements with great anxiety, here covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud. In some few minutes Paul came running back.

‘I don't think there is any old man there at all,’ he cried. ‘I have knocked, and kicked at the door, but no one came, and——’

But Uncle Bill interrupted him. ‘Did you, did you,’ he stammered, while his face grew very pale, ‘did you see any sign of a woman about there? a young, a pretty woman, a very pretty woman?’

Paul shook his head. ‘I don't think there is anyone there at all,’ he replied, ‘for the shutters are all over the windows, and——’

Uncle Bill waited to hear no more. He was even now striding towards the cottage in a way that showed Paul he



must be already thoroughly rested. He was pleased to see this, and trotted after him as quickly as he could. Uncle Bill reached the garden-gate first, and stood looking over it.

'Well,' asked Paul as he joined him, 'did I tell you right? There is no old man here, is there? nor young woman either?'

Uncle Bill pointed to a board nailed upon one of the trees towering above the holly hedge. "'To let,'" he read, in a hard, unnatural voice; "'this cottage to let;'" and just look at it! Ruin and neglect are written all over it. It has been to let years, Snowdrop—years.'

Paul was instantly all concern again. 'You look so sorry-like, and you speak so sorry, Uncle Bill,' he said, 'I am afraid you are very sad about something. Is it because you can't find the old man who used to live in this cottage? When folks leave one house they most times go to another, don't they? Can't you think where your old man went to live when he left this cottage? Think very hard, and see if you can't, and then we will try to find him.'

'It won't take very much thinking to fix the spot where the old man will be,' replied Uncle Bill. 'He was born in this cottage, and he would only leave it for *one* place. Come along; we must go and look.' And then he took Paul's hand once more, and led him quickly away.

Through the green lane, over the stile, across the bare cornfields they hurried, until they came to the bridle-road. Paul wondered where they were going, and he glanced inquiringly once or twice into Uncle Bill's face. But the face was hard and set, the brow was contracted with anxious frowns, and Paul began to see that there was indeed something very wrong to-day, and something, too, that he could not hope to understand. So he asked no questions. He only sighed, as faster and faster he had to move his little feet, for Uncle Bill seemed to have quite forgotten how very small they were, and how quickly he was making them run. Suddenly he stopped. Paul looked up, and found they were pausing by another gate. Not a broken wooden one this time, but a handsome iron one. It yielded easily to Uncle Bill's hand, and they passed through. The afternoon was now very far advanced. The shades of evening were already limiting the vision; but there was still light enough for Paul to see a grey stone church standing before him, and the

white monuments and green mounds of the sleeping dead lying around him. Uncle Bill was no longer holding his hand, but was a yard or two in advance, striding quickly across the mounds, and between the tombstones. He followed as fast as he could, stumbling here and there as he caught his foot first in one thing and then in another, often falling down, but up again in an instant, for the place had terrors for him in that uncertain light, and he was dreadfully afraid of losing sight of Uncle Bill and of being left all by himself. Very thankful he was when Uncle Bill at last paused, and he was able to get to his side, and catch firmly hold of his coat. It was easy work to do this, for he was kneeling upon a lowly mound before a grey headstone, peering eagerly into the black letters carved upon it. 'Ay,' he was saying, as Paul joined him, spelling out the words with his finger; 'age ten—that's the lad; and Mary, forty-six—that's the mother; and Peter, seventy-three—that's the old man; and—yes—no! Here, give me a light! Where are the matches?'

In feverish haste he thrust his hand from one pocket into another until he found them, when, striking a light, he bent once more eagerly towards the letters. The match burned brilliantly, then grew dull; finally the lighted end fell into the grass, leaving the charred stick in Uncle Bill's hand. But he did not strike another. He had seen enough. Falling back in a sitting posture, he exclaimed:

'Nothing more! only the old man! Then where is *she*?'

No one was near who could answer this question, and many minutes passed in perfect silence. Paul began to feel frightened. It was getting very dark, and this was a strange place to be in; and worse than all, Uncle Bill was looking, and speaking, very strangely too. He threw his arms round his neck and crouched close to him.

'Let us go away,' he whispered; 'oh, do let us go away!' And Uncle Bill mechanically arose, and lifted him into his arms, and quietly made his way to the road.

Not until they had left the churchyard far behind them did Paul's spirits revive sufficiently to allow him to speak. His thoughts were evidently still with the grey headstone, for he broke the silence by saying:

'Then the old man you wanted to find in that cottage is dead, Uncle Bill?'

'Yes, Snowdrop ; he is dead, poor old chap !'

'And is he buried in that place we left a while since ?'

'Ay, lad ; he is there with his wife and little son, safe enough.'

'Are you very sorry, Uncle Bill ?'

'Sorry,' repeated the other, and his tone was more expressive of surprise than of any other sentiment, 'why should I be sorry ?'

'I don't know, Uncle Bill ; but I thought you were. I thought you expected to see him in that cottage, and that you would be right sorry to find him dead.'

'Not I,' replied Uncle Bill carelessly ; 'I don't know that I'm not just as pleased to find him snugly laid to rest.'

This assertion Paul found very puzzling. He pondered greatly as to what it could mean ; but he could get to no satisfactory conclusion. By-and-by he became tired of wondering, and cried :

'Where are we going, Uncle Bill ? I am so hungry and tired !'

These complaints arrested Uncle Bill's footsteps. With a hasty 'If I hadn't forgotten all about the time,' he stood, and looked up and down the road. Then he read a sign-post near, considered for a few moments, and then strode rapidly on. Another half-mile brought him to a small village. Going from cottage to cottage, he at last succeeded in finding a cheap lodging. Paul was half asleep by this time. He was aroused to partake of some homely food, and then he was laid upon a bed, where he soon fell into a sound slumber. When Uncle Bill perceived this, he lighted his pipe, and went out once more into the clear night air, intending to stroll down to the village inn.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

'Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'—PSALMS xxxvii. 4.

WHAT had Uncle Bill heard at the village inn ? Something that had made his strong frame shake with sobs of joy—something that had made him fall on his knees beside the

bed where Paul was sleeping and pour out a broken prayer of praise and gratitude—something that had driven sleep from his eyelids and kept him all night long seated by the window drawing whiff after whiff from his clay pipe—pondering over a sad past and planning out a happy future until the darkness gradually melted into dawn, and dawn again into the light of day. And now once more the labourers were busy in the fields around, sounds of stirring were to be heard in the cottage kitchen below; and suddenly Paul sat up in bed, and after a bewildered stare exclaimed:

‘Why, Uncle Bill, you have been sitting in that chair all night!’

‘How do you know?’ asked Uncle Bill.

‘Because I have looked at the bed, and no one has slept in it but me,’ replied Paul. ‘What have you been doing there all night?’

‘Thinking!’

‘Thinking!’ repeated Paul thoughtfully, as he got out of bed and began to put on his clothes. ‘You must have been thinking of something very particular to keep you sitting in that chair all night. It must have been about my dear dad!’

In his opinion no more important subject than this could possibly occupy either thoughts or conversation.

‘Well, it *was* a bit about him,’ replied Uncle Bill.

‘Ah,’ said Paul, with a gleam of satisfaction; ‘I thought so. And I know what you’ve been thinking about him, too. You’ve been thinking that it is quite time we came across him. Now haven’t you?’

Uncle Bill paused and hesitated; nay, more, he flushed, and a look of pain stole over his features. He had long been feeling ashamed of the deception he was practising upon the trusting child—terribly ashamed of the falsehoods he had allowed to fall so easily from his lips the evening he had met him in the park. Little Paul had not taught him to pray in vain. He had not sung him blind Susie’s hymns in vain, nor yet in vain had he prattled of the bright home ‘far above the golden sun’ prepared by a loving merciful Saviour for the children of faith and obedience. It was no longer a careless, God-forgetting, God-defying Uncle Bill that strode by his side, but a repentant, humble servant of the great King of heaven and earth, whose hope was in the

precious Blood that alone can wash out the sins of a regretted past and give grace for a purer future. Led by a little child, he had returned to the faith he had held as a little child. Paul knew nothing of this, but Uncle Bill knew it well, and as he daily thanked God that the boy had been cast in his path and acknowledged the debt of gratitude he owed him, his affection for him seemed to increase more and more. But was he doing right by him? Often and often had he asked himself this question: he was asking it now, he was wondering, and not for the first time by many, if, in the matter of his father, it would not be better and nobler, and more honest to tell him the whole truth.

The words to do so were trembling on his lips when he met Paul's eager, sparkling eyes—no, he dare not. He dare not crush all those bright hopes! He dare not make that rosy smiling mouth quiver with the weight of a disappointment he knew would be intense. He must wait; but he pressed the little form in his arms, and he cried:

'My dear little bit of a wayside Snowdrop! How was it *you* crept into Uncle Bill's heart that he thought was shut to everyone till you came with your great brown eyes bringing him the loaf, because he'd said he was hungry? Ah, well, old chap! never mind; Uncle Bill means to do his best for you. You shall want for nothing; so don't blame him, old fellow; whatever happens, don't blame him.'

He was thinking again of the falsehoods in the park; and of the day when Paul must learn the truth. Paul's answer was a look of amazement.

'I'll never blame you for anything,' he replied. 'You're my good, kind Uncle Bill, and I'll always love you very much, because you're taking me to my dear dad. But tell me what you've heard about him? I'm sure you've heard something. Are we very near him now?'

Again poor Uncle Bill hesitated uneasily before he replied:

'I can't say, Snowdrop—I really can't say. No, don't cry. Be a brave lad and go on hoping. Yes, that's it! *Hope*, boy—hope! Oh, *hope* is a fine thing! Try to have a lot of it, my little Snowdrop; and there's no telling what may happen. I'm sure after what the good Lord has let turn up for me, I'd shout out to all the world never to leave go of *hope*.'

'What *has* happened to you?' asked Paul, looking very puzzled, and wiping some starting tears from his eyes.

Uncle Bill had to clear his voice before he could reply; then he said :

'What did I say I had lost at the old cottage yonder ?'

It was Paul's turn to hesitate now.

'I don't know,' he at last said, 'for I can't quite make out. At first you said it was a flower ; but when you sent me to the cottage, you told me to look for a woman—a young, pretty woman. I begin to think it's a woman you've lost, Uncle Bill, and not a flower at all.'

Uncle Bill half sobbed, half chuckled, as he replied :

'Never mind what it was, old chap. Here's the grand thing ! *I think I've found it.* Oh, Snowdrop ! Snowdrop ! *I think I've found it.*'

Paul began to dance about the room, though more from a desire to share Uncle Bill's evident joy, than from a right understanding of what had actually occurred.

'Where is it ?' he asked, clapping his hands.

'A good way from here,' was the reply, 'but, thank God ! we are on the right track. We must set off at once ; so be quick and get dressed.'

Half an hour later they were again on their way. The morning was bright, but the air had a little winter in it for the first time that year, and by-and-by Paul complained of the cold. Uncle Bill drew an old coat from his bundle and wrapped it round him, remarking :

'Every day will get sharper now, old fellow ! No more loitering about, or strolling miles out of our way. We must put our best foot forward, and get over the ground as fast as we can.'

'Do you know where you are going to?' asked Paul; 'because often before, when I've asked you, you haven't seemed to know.'

'I know now, safe enough, thank the good Lord, who has heard my prayers in spite of all my years of backsliding,' was Uncle Bill's fervent reply. 'I learnt all that last night. If I'd only some spare silver to take us in one of those flying steam-engines we've so often watched tearing across the country, we might be there some time to-night. But I've only a few shillings over a pound by me, with all my saving

and working. We've spent a good lot, you know, since the flowers and the butterflies flew away. We've had to have a warm bed every night. And then your new boots, and socks, and jacket, and scarf, weren't got for nothing. So the money has grown less than I like, and we must take care of what's left; for, thank the good Lord again, I believe I shall soon want every penny of it.'

'You haven't told me where we're going to yet, Uncle Bill,' observed Paul.

'We're bound right for the other side of the county,' was the reply. 'We want a big house called "The Towers," and we'll find it somewhere near a quiet village on the coast, that goes by the name of Dunnersbridge.'

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## CHAPTER XIX.

'I know that Thou canst do everything.'—JOB xlii. 2.

ONE or two evenings later, when an unusually early winter had covered the brown earth with glistening snow, Paul's powers of endurance suddenly gave way. Uncle Bill had certainly been in earnest when he had stated his intention of getting over the ground as quickly as possible, for for the last few days they had been walking early and late. Uncle Bill had not found a night's resting-place until midnight was almost approached, and, long before dawn had sent forth her first glimmers, he had been again on his way, poor sleepy little Paul on his back. Such rides had been pleasant enough before Jack Frost made the air so sharp! but now, in spite of all Uncle Bill's rough care, the little fellow began to suffer terribly from the cold; and memory, sharpened by such sufferings, turned at last regretfully towards the cosy home he had left so far behind in the great City.

'I want to go to granny and Charlie,' he had said half a dozen times this afternoon, his blue lips quivering, and his little numb fingers clinging for warmth to Uncle Bill's neck.

'But don't you want to see your "dear dad"?' asked Uncle Bill encouragingly.

'He won't let me find him,' faltered Paul, 'and I am cold; and I would like to see Susie—I would.'

Then Uncle Bill slung him from his back into his arms, and rubbed him well all over, and took him by the hand, and made him run ; and said the sign-posts told him that another hour would bring them to their journey's end, and then they would sit down by a warm fire, and eat such a good tea. But the hour was very long. The keen night air began to whistle through the bare branches of the woods around them. Twilight was spreading abroad her mists and gloom. The white snow looked ghastly in its intense dreariness. Everything appeared forsaken and hopeless ; and poor half-frozen little Paul, his limbs shivering and his teeth chattering, exclaimed once more :

'I want to go to Charlie, Uncle Bill,' and burst into a torrent of tears.

All Uncle Bill's attempts at consolation were in vain. Paul sobbed and sobbed, tired despairing sobs that distressed Uncle Bill terribly, knowing, as he did, that there was good cause for them. The little fellow was perfectly blue with the cold, and darkness was coming on quickly.

For some long time now, they seemed to have been turning from lane into lane, skirted at each side by a high gaunt-looking hedge. The only sound that fell upon their ears was the crackling of snow under their feet, and the rising wind swaying naked boughs to and fro ; and Uncle Bill was fast coming to the uncomfortable conclusion that he had lost his way. He had no lantern ; and if he had had one, it would have been of little use in lanes to which he was a perfect stranger. His heart began to beat anxiously. The thought of passing the night exposed to all the severity of the weather was very terrible. Paul was again on his back. He put him down on to his feet, saying :

'I dare not carry you any longer, old chap, or you will be frozen. We must run and keep ourselves warm.'

But running through such deep snow under the circumstances was very painful work. Paul's cries redoubled, and Uncle Bill was soon too depressed and alarmed to try to check them. He pushed desperately on, until more snow began to fall, beating into their faces and preventing them from seeing where they were going. It was useless to proceed any further. Uncle Bill came to a stand-still. They were doomed. In another hour or so they would be both



frozen to death. So indeed he thought, and so they undoubtedly would ; but just then a light appeared at the other side of the hedge to their right. It was moving. Uncle Bill watched it breathlessly for a moment or two. Then a gleam of hope darted into his breast ; for no light ever moved like that of itself. It must be a lantern in somebody's hand. He shouted with all the energy of despair. Immediately the light stood still, and a cheery voice called in reply : 'Hallo ! who's there ?'

'I've lost my way !' cried Uncle Bill ; 'and I've a little lad here with me. I'm afraid he's freezing already. For pity's sake come and save us !'

Then the light went on again, there was the sound of approaching footsteps, and in another second a young man, neatly though humbly clad, with a kind, open face, stood before them.

'Lost your way?' he repeated, raising his lantern and examining them curiously. 'Why, where do you want to go to ?'

'I wan't to go to a place called Dunnersbridge,' replied Uncle Bill. 'I was told it was somewhere about here, but I can't find it, and my poor child is near dead with the cold.'

In saying these words, he stooped down and raised Paul once more in his arms. The boy stopped crying, but the tears were still wet upon his blue, pinched face ; and as the light of the lantern fell upon him, he looked altogether such a pitiful little object, that the young man said compassionately :

'Poor little fellow ! He is indeed in a bad way. I am so glad I met you ! Dunnersbridge village is a good mile and a half from here ; but my cottage is close to, and my Polly will give you a hearty welcome. So come with me, and rest and warm yourselves.'

Uncle Bill was not generally very profuse in his 'thank you's,' but the one he ejaculated in reply to this kind proposition was indeed fervent and heartfelt, though far more for Paul's sake than his own. He followed his kind guide, and a few moments brought them to the garden-gate of a small cottage, in the rustic porch of which a young woman was standing.

'Is that you, Ned ?' she called, as she heard the latch lift ;

and as soon as the 'Yes, Polly, it's me right enough,' fell upon her ears, she exclaimed: 'I was beginning to get so frightened. Whatever's made you so late?'

'I've been down to the station to see about those bulbs I'm expecting from town,' replied Ned. 'And a good thing I went, too; for look what I've found coming back. This poor fellow has lost his way, and the child in his arms is half frozen.'

Polly had glanced a little suspiciously at the tall stranger thus summarily presented to her. But at the word 'child,' her features underwent a speedy transformation. Only great womanly kindness and compassion were expressed in look and voice, as she stretched out her arms, crying:

'A child out this bitter night! Poor little thing! Give it to me quick, and let me get it to the fire.'

Ned and Uncle Bill followed as she passed hurriedly into her little kitchen, and the latter sank down into an armchair drawn forward by his kind host, and with a sigh of relief and satisfaction glanced around him. That small kitchen certainly looked like fairyland after the cold and darkness outside. The bright fire, the white hearthstone, the red-tiled floor, and the cloth spread for the evening meal, formed a picture of homely comfort that somehow made him sigh again, and even brought the tears once more to Paul's tired eyes. Polly had him on her knee in the rocking-chair, and she was doing her best to make him forget his pain and trouble.

'Let me take these wet boots off, darling,' she said kindly; 'and, Ned, just get me a pail of hot water. We'll put his little feet into it. That will warm them better than all my rubbing. His jacket is wet through, too. Let me pull it off, dear. Poor little fellow! Why, he's half an icicle already! Whatever would he have been by morning?'

'That is just what I have been asking myself this last hour, ma'am,' observed Uncle Bill. 'What would we have both been? I must have missed the right road entirely; for we have been knocking about these lanes since before two o'clock, and if it hadn't been for your husband (as I take it this fine young fellow here is) I would never have found my way out.'

'Knocking about these lanes since before two o'clock!'

cried Polly; 'then you must be hungry as well as cold. Ned, fill the teapot for me, and hand me that bit of pork from the pantry yonder, and the pan to fry it; we must get these poor starved folks something to eat.'

'Isn't it just as I said, old chap?' observed Uncle Bill to Paul some twenty minutes later, when they were seated at the table enjoying a comfortable meal. 'Didn't I tell you a while back that we would soon be sitting by a warm fire eating a good tea? And here we are.'

A happy smile was Paul's only reply; and Polly asked:

'Is he your little son?'

'No,' replied Uncle Bill; 'I shouldn't mind if he was. But he will have nothing to do with me. I'm not good-looking enough for him. Tell the lady who I am, Snowdrop, and where your dad is.'

'That is Uncle Bill,' cried Paul, 'and my dear dad is somewhere about here; but he takes a deal of looking for.'

A significant wink from Uncle Bill prevented any explanation being asked of this rather extraordinary statement, and Polly inquired instead:

'Is the child's name Snowdrop?'

'No,' replied Uncle Bill. 'I call him that. I don't know why. It's a fancy of mine. His proper name is Paul.'

'We haven't found any snowdrops yet,' interrupted Paul eagerly, as the idea just occurred to him. 'They are like my dad. They don't mean us to find them.'

'There'll be plenty of snowdrops about here in another two months, dear,' said Polly.

'Yes,' put in Ned, 'the woods will be white with them; but what do you want snowdrops for, my little man?'

'I thought I would like to have some to give to my dad,' replied Paul; 'but we haven't found any yet, though we're always looking. There might be a few in these woods, Uncle Bill; just one or two that have come out a bit early. We had better look, hadn't we? But,' he added, his bright countenance falling, 'I don't believe they will be of any use. We can't give them to my dear dad if we don't find him; and I don't believe he means to be found; and I want Charlie—I love Charlie.'

By this time Polly and Ned had both concluded, from the mysterious signs Uncle Bill was actively making, that there

was perhaps the best of all reasons why Paul's 'dear dad' refused to be 'found.' And the eyes of the former shone moist with sympathy as she asked tenderly :

'Who is Charlie, dear? Your little brother?'

'Oh no!' cried Paul; 'I've no brother; and Charlie isn't little. He is big—as big as him'—pointing to Ned—'and he loves me, and I love him; and I want to go to him.'

'We shall be going very soon now,' observed Uncle Bill. 'We'll look well round here, and see if we can't come across that dad of yours; and if we can't, we will go back—eh, old fellow?'

'Yes,' replied Paul, 'we'll do that. I shall be sorry to go back without him after coming so far; and Susie will be sorry, too—and Jack, and Robbie, and Billy Blake will laugh at me dreadful. But I can't help it; if we don't find him soon, we must go back without him; because I want to go to Charlie.'

Again Uncle Bill silently gave Polly to understand that the less said upon the subject of Paul's 'dad' the better; so no remark was made upon what the little fellow had just said. There was a pause of some few moments; then Polly asked gently :

'And his mother? Has the child no mother?'

Paul answered for himself.

'Oh yes!' he cried. 'I have a mammy; that's the same as a mother, you know. I have a beautiful mammy; but she is in heaven. She went there a long time ago.'

The tears in Polly's kind eyes overflowed now.

'Poor little orphan!' she murmured.

'What is an orphan?' asked Paul.

'A little child whose mammy and daddy are both in the beautiful heaven,' was the answer he received.

Paul considered the subject for a moment or two; then he observed :

'I am not an orphan, then; 'cause it is only my mammy that is in heaven. My daddy is knocking about somewhere here; but he takes a deal of looking for.'

The sigh that accompanied these words, and the wistful look upon the little face, induced tender-hearted Polly to introduce a more cheerful topic of conversation. From that moment she gave Paul her whole attention, leaving Ned to

entertain their older guest ; and very soon she was repaid by seeing his countenance beaming with bright smiles. She took care that he made a hearty meal. But he was very weary. His little eyes were looking very heavy, and when she had once more seated herself in the rocking-chair, with him on her knee, he very soon fell fast asleep. His dark curly head was pillowed on her kind breast, her arms were clasped around his sturdy little form, and she was gazing tenderly upon him, when Ned, who had been watching her in silence for some little while, suddenly observed :

‘Polly is in her glory now that she’s a child in her arms wanting comforting and taking care of. There never was such a girl for children ! I often come home and find her with two or three that she’s borrowed in the village. Mistress laughs at her, and says she does it to keep her hand in like. She was nurse to our little lady at The Towers till I brought her away to take care of me, just twelve months ago yesterday.’

‘Is it the lady of The Towers you call *mistress* ?’ asked Uncle Bill eagerly.

‘Yes,’ replied Ned. ‘We call her *mistress* because we’ve both been in her service years and years. I am with her still. I’m one of her gardeners ; and have been, ever since I was big enough to pull up stray weeds. But is anything the matter ? You look put out.’

Uncle Bill was showing signs of great agitation.

‘Tell me about this Towers !’ he now cried hurriedly. ‘That’s the place I’ve come all these miles to see. Isn’t the mistress of it a widow lady, with one child—a little daughter, and——’

‘Yes,’ interrupted Polly ; ‘that’s her. And if you’re in any trouble, as—asking your pardon—you really seem to be, she’s just the right one to go to. For there isn’t a kinder, sweeter lady in the county, and I say it who know it.’

‘Yes,’ put in Ned ; ‘but she won’t be at home these two days. There’s only the little lady at The Towers at this present time. The mistress has gone off visiting, a matter of ten miles away. She and the maid, poor Ellen Erringford——’

He could say no more. With something between a sob and a shriek, Uncle Bill had risen to his feet and seized his cap.

'Thank God!' he cried. 'Oh, thank God! I've found her! Where is this place you speak of ten miles away? I must go at once.'

'I know, I know!' here sang out Polly, her kind eyes glistening with joy. 'You're Ellen's husband!—her sailor husband!—that everyone said would never come home any more! I've heard all about you, many and many a time. Oh, I'm so glad! She has never forgot you, or given you up, or stopped praying for you, although everyone told her it was all no use. Go to her quick, but gentle-like, or you'll send her mad with joy.'

'He'd better wait till morning,' began Ned. 'Why——'

'Wait till morning!' repeated Polly indignantly. 'If you'd been away from me all those sad years, would *you* wait till morning? Why, legs made of steam-engines wouldn't bring you to me fast enough! There, get the lantern lit, like a good lad; and go with him as far as the cross-roads. After that the way is as straight as my knitting-needle. And the house where missis is visiting is the very first you come to—a big place standing back from the road. The people at the lodge will tell you where to find your poor Ellen, and give you a bed if it happens to be too late to catch a sight of her to-night.'

All this was addressed to Uncle Bill. He, poor fellow, was trembling with emotion and impatience. He could hardly steady his voice while he poured forth his thanks; and he could hardly keep his feet still while he waited for Ned to put on his top-coat, and get the lantern lighted. In his great joy, he quite forgot little Paul; and he and his kind young friend faced once more the snow and the wind, leaving him lying still asleep in Polly's arms.

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## CHAPTER XX.

'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.'—  
JOB xlii. 12.

THE following morning the bright-faced clock in Polly's little kitchen was striking the hour of nine when Paul opened his brown eyes and looked about him. He was

greatly surprised to find himself in a strange room with a strange face bending over him. But it was a kind, good, smiling face, so he was not frightened. He quietly asked what it was doing there, and to whom it belonged. A little explanation brought back the events of the night before to his memory, and he at once renewed his friendship with Polly, and got up and dressed in high spirits.

'Where's my Uncle Bill?' he asked, when she led him down to the kitchen and placed some breakfast before him.

He looked a little disappointed when told that he had gone out on important business. But, after a few moments' reflection, he suddenly brightened, and clapping his little hands, cried :

'I know what it is ! He has gone to look for my dear dad !'

Polly had been thinking very much of this same 'dear dad,' since Uncle Bill had left them the evening before, and she now observed to Ned, who just then came in with his cap on :

'I'll be very much surprised if it doesn't turn out just as I told you last night.'

'So will I,' was Ned's reply ; 'and so will everyone else. For one thing, the lad's face tells its own tale. I never saw a greater likeness.'

'What do they say at The Towers?' she asked.

'Why,' he cried, 'that is what I came back to tell you. I'm to take the boy down at once, for them to see. But I made a fine mistake last night. Ellen didn't go away yesterday after all. Missis changed her mind at the last minute, and went by herself.'

'Then that poor fellow will have his walk for nothing. What a pity!' cried Polly.

'Yes,' said Ned. 'I feel quite vexed about it. But he'll be down here sharp enough this morning—trust him ! I only wonder he wasn't back by daybreak. Something must have kept him.'

'Has Ellen been told?' asked Polly eagerly.

'No,' was the reply. 'They've just let out hints that there's a big chance of a great happiness coming to her, that's all they dare do yet. Besides, they want to see the boy first, to make quite sure he's the right one.'

'He's done his breakfast,' cried Polly excitedly. 'Just give me a minute to wash his face again, and brush his pretty curls.'

'Where am I going?' asked little Paul, as these kind offices were performed for him.

'Only for a walk with Ned,' replied Polly, 'to see a beautiful, beautiful house. You'll like that, won't you?'

'I shall like to go for a walk,' was Paul's reply, 'because I want to look for some snowdrops. Uncle Bill is going to find my dear dad to-day, and I want to have some snowdrops for him.'

Polly kissed him, and cried that he'd find something better than snowdrops where Ned was going to take him. And then she wrapped him up warmly, and stood in the porch and watched Ned lead him down the lane.

A short cut through a wood, over a stile, and along a road to the right. 'Shall we find some snowdrops here?' asked little Paul.

And Ned replied, 'No; they are all asleep, deep down in the warm earth. The snow is too thick for them to venture out yet. We must wait till it gets thinner.'

'But Uncle Bill said they would come and drive the cold snow away,' persisted Paul. 'When will that be?'

And Ned replied, 'In the Lord's good time, little one. Hard winters, like hard troubles, pass away in the Lord's good time, which is when they have done their appointed work.'

Paul would have asked for an explanation; but just then the subject was driven altogether from his mind, for they had stopped before the door of a handsome country mansion, and Ned was ringing the bell.

The summons was answered, and they entered a richly-appointed entrance-hall, where Paul had soon plenty to do in looking about him, while Ned whispered a few words to the attendant man-servant. This latter went off in a minute or two and left them standing alone.

Paul's attention was altogether engaged with a group of marble figures just before him when he was aroused by Ned, who suddenly said: 'Look here!'

He turned his head, and met the earnest gaze of a pale, dark-eyed woman, about four-and-twenty years of age. She



came forward when she saw she was noticed, and seating herself on a chair near, drew Paul to her side and stroked his little face and black curls tenderly.

'Whose little boy are you?' she asked as she did so.

'Uncle Bill's,' he replied; 'but I'm going to have a daddy soon. He's been lost; but we've nearly found him now.'

'And your mother, dear?' she said.

'Oh!' he cried, 'she's in heaven; she went a long time ago.'

The woman's eyes filled with tears. He noticed them, and asked,

'Why do you cry?'

'Because,' she replied, 'I had a little boy once, and I lost him. I have tried so hard to find him, but I have heard nothing of him yet. I think he will be about your age. I am longing, oh! so much, to hold him in my arms just as I am holding you. That is why I cry.'

'Is he lost, your little boy?' cried Paul excitedly; 'because, if he is, I will ask my Uncle Bill to find him for you. He is a first-rate one to find lost folks, my Uncle Bill is. He has been looking ever so long for my dad, and he has nearly found him now.'

'Ah,' he would be clever indeed to find my baby,' replied the woman. 'Through my good mistress's kindness, many, many men have been looking for him, and clever, sharp men too, whose trade it is to seek out those who are missing from their homes and friends. But they have not found him yet.'

'They *may*. You must give them time, Ellen, and be brave,' here put in Ned, who was watching the two with great interest.

'Yes,' she replied with a sigh; 'and patient. I know that. But I have waited such a time. What is your name, my sweet little fellow?'

'Uncle Bill calls me oftenest Snowdrop,' was the answer. 'But Charlie says my name is Paul.'

An eager, wistful look came into the woman's face; her pale cheeks flushed; her eyes dilated. Placing her hands on the boy's shoulders, she gazed searchingly at him.

'*Paul—Charlie!*' she almost gasped. 'Oh, what does this mean?'

'Tush, tush !' here said Ned. 'There are plenty of Pauls and Charlies in the kingdom. You mustn't think everyone you chance to come across is yours ; you mustn't indeed. See, here is James come to take us to the young lady. Let us go, Ellen ; and be a good girl.'

So saying, he gently drew Paul away, and led him by the hand towards the man-servant, who was beckoning for them to approach.

They looked back before turning into a side-corridor. The dark-eyed woman was still seated where they had left her, only she had hidden her face in her hands.

Soon they stopped before a door. The man-servant threw it open ; and saying, 'This is the little boy, miss,' pushed Paul gently into a pleasant morning-room. Before the child could recover from the surprise this caused him, he saw a little girl spring forward, who seized his hands, and cried, in tones of the greatest delight :

'It is he ! it is he himself. Look, Miss Langton ; it is Paul ! He is found at last. Oh, I am so glad !'

It was little Miss Ethel Dunraven. Paul recognised her at once, as he did also the lady who was sitting sewing by the fire.

It is difficult to say which of the two was the most pleased to see him. Miss Langton was holding him by the hand, as if she were anxious to make quite sure that he was really flesh and blood.

'Oh, you precious child !' she cried. 'If I had only known that evening in the park all I was to suffer on your account ! Why, night after night, I've had your little drowning face before me.'

'Yes,' interrupted Ethel : 'we all thought you were drowned, Paul, we did indeed. I felt sure of it directly I heard you were lost. And when I told mamma that I had found you asleep by the water *once*, she thought so too. The whole lake has been dragged for you, Paul ! And, oh ! we have all cried for you so much ! I cried ; whenever I thought of you lying at the bottom of that dark cold water, I cried. And Miss Langton was so sorry for not making you leave the park with us that night, that she cried. And when mamma went to see poor little blind Susie, and found her breaking her heart for you, she cried too. She couldn't

help it. We all cried. Your granny sobbed and sobbed, and your Charlie was half wild. But Susie was the worst ; for she could not help to look for you ; she could only sit in her little chair and cry. They thought she would pine away, Paul ; and so she would have done, only mamma made her go every day to the school for little blind girls, where they have taught her to do all kinds of clever things, and where she has found plenty of little companions to make her gay again. But where did you go to, Paul ? tell us that quickly. Where *did* you go to ?

'Where did I go to ?' repeated Paul bewilderedly, while Miss Langton interposed :

'Gently, gently, Ethel ; you are talking too fast. You quite perplex him.'

'Oh, but I have so much to tell him,' cried the little girl. 'And I am so glad to see him ! and mamma will be so glad to know that he is found ! Do you know, Paul, that all the policemen have been looking for you, and a description of you has been in the newspapers, and a big reward offered for you. You will never guess why.'

Ethel began to laugh here, and clapped her little hands joyfully together ; and Miss Langton observed :

'I think you had better let *me* explain all that to Paul, my dear. You are speaking so quickly that he will hardly understand you.'

'Oh no !' she cried ; '*do* let me tell him ! I will make him understand ; I will indeed !'

'Well, gently and slowly then,' replied the governess ; and Ethel accordingly did her best to obey, and began :

'It was all through your going to the church that Sunday morning, and asking my uncle to christen you ; for the clergyman who talked to you in the vestry was my uncle Gerald. Well, mamma came home from France a day or two after, and she went first thing to see about the funny little Paul who wanted to be christened all in a minute. She found your granny and your Charlie in terrible distress, for you were lost ; and she heard that you were the same little Paul who was so kind to blind Susie, and whom Miss Langton and I had told her we had left in the park an evening or two before. And then, Paul, from what your Charlie said, she began to be afraid that you were no other

than the little baby my nurse Ellen had lost years and years before, as I told you the day I took Susie the beads and first saw you, and heard your name was Paul. Well, mamma sent for Ellen, for she was here at The Towers then, not at our other house, far away near the City where you live. She came off by the next train, and she went to see your Charlie, and she knew him directly and he knew her. And she hadn't been drowned in the river after all, Paul, as Charlie always thought. She doesn't know how she got in. Perhaps she fell in, or perhaps she fancied she had got to the end of the journey, and walked in. She can't tell; for after she left Charlie and you that night to take her work home, she was taken very ill in the dark, cold streets. She could hardly drag herself along, and she can remember nothing after staggering on board the boat—nothing at all. But she wasn't drowned. The tide must have carried her quickly along, and thrown her against the oars of a little boat in which some sailors were rowing to a big ship at anchor up the river. It was very foggy at the time; but they felt something heavy on their oar, and they found poor Ellen clinging to it, and they dragged her in. They thought she was dead, but when they got to their ship the doctor said she wasn't; but she was dreadfully ill. I think she must have gone mad; for when they got her to a hospital a few days later, she was weeks and weeks before she was able to talk sensibly. And when she was well enough to remember what had passed, and send some one to O'Brian's Court to look for you and Charlie, you had both gone. No one could tell her where. She thought she would die for a time. Then she changed her mind and tried her hardest to get well, that she might be able to leave the hospital and look for you. Well, she did; but she couldn't find you, for she was very, very poor, and she had no one to help her, and the City is a very big place. After a long time she gave it up, and went home to her old father, and lived with him until he died. Then she went back to the City and looked for you again; but she couldn't find you. Then my old nurse, Polly, got married, and mamma advertised in the newspaper for a new one, and this poor Ellen answered, and we took her and liked her very much. When she told us her sad story we were very sorry for her, and we tried to find her little baby for her; but it

was of no use. Mamma thought it must be dead, but Ellen never thought so. She always said Charlie had it somewhere, and that he would take good care of it. And she used to pray day after day that the good Lord Jesus would let her find it. You may think how dreadfully sorry we were to hear that *you* were indeed her poor baby, and that you were lost again. Oh, what trouble we were all in! We thought you *must* be drowned, and that lake in the park was dragged again and again. Then, when the men declared you were not in it, all the policemen were told to look for you; and now you are found, and oh! I am so very, very glad!

'There, I told you you would only perplex Paul,' said Miss Langton, as Ethel paused and began to laugh again. 'See how bewildered the poor little fellow looks. He has not an idea what you have been talking about.'

'Never mind,' said Ethel; 'I will try again. Now, Paul, listen to me. Where did you tell Susie and me, that day I took her the box of beads, your mammy was?'

'In the beautiful heaven,' replied Paul promptly.

'Well, she *isn't*,' said Ethel. 'That is what I want you to understand. She isn't in heaven at all. It was all a mistake. She didn't die. She is alive, and you are soon going to see her. Do you hear?'

'Not in heaven!' said Paul, opening his dark eyes very wide. 'My mammy not in heaven! Then where is she?'

'Here,' cried Ethel; 'here, in this house!' and in her delight she laughed and clapped her hands once more.

'Hush, hush, dear!' said Miss Langton. 'We are all very pleased, of course; but this is hardly a laughing matter. We must think of how we can best break this joyful news to poor Ellen, and—ah, here she is!'

So engaged had they both been with little Paul, that they had not heard the door open a few seconds before, or perceived that Ellen was standing on the threshold of the room, flushed and breathless. She now came forward, and throwing herself down on her knees beside the child, she clasped him to her bosom and sobbed out:

'I knew it! I felt it! The good Lord has heard my prayer at last! How can I thank Him? Oh, darling, you must love me very much, for I am your mother!'

And Paul looked on in great wonderment, while tears of

joy and thankfulness were poured over him, and he was called by every epithet of endearment that maternal affection and tenderness could suggest ; and a pair of eyes, the counterpart of his own, all moist with love, gazed into his, and a trembling hand stroked his curly head and his rosy cheeks, and a trembling voice cried, in broken accents, that some one must say that it was *really* true ; that it was *really* her little child she had found again ; that the fine strong boy in her arms had *really* once been the tiny weak baby she had so often fondled and so dearly loved ! For she couldn't believe it—no, she couldn't !

And Miss Langton's eyes were dim too, for sorely had the good lady reproached herself when she heard that the little fellow had never been seen or heard of since the dusky evening on which she had left him busily gathering the buttercups and daisies in the park ; and many anxious moments had she known on his account.

And two big tears were shining like dewdrops on warm-hearted little Ethel's flushed cheeks ; for sorely, too, had she grieved over the uncertain fate of blind Susie's lost play-fellow, and heartily had she shared poor Ellen's terrible distress and suspense.

Paul's brown eyes were the only ones that were dry. He had known no sorrow, so *his* only sparkled with delight as his little hand stroked his mother's face, and he murmured proudly :

'*My* mammy, my dear, beautiful mammy !'

'But where did you go to, Paul ? who took you away that night ?' cried Ethel, when the first excitement was over, and they could think and talk again. And he replied :

'I came away with Uncle Bill.'

'But who was Uncle Bill ?' persisted Ethel.

And Ellen managed to find her voice, and asked :

'Who was the bad, cruel Uncle Bill who had stolen her darling away ?'

Paul looked very shocked. 'Oh no,' he cried ; 'Uncle Bill is not bad and cruel. He is kind and good. He brought me away to find my dad ; for, you know, a fellow—a proper fellow—ought to have a dad.' Then he wondered much ; for Ellen had bowed her head upon his dark curls, and was sobbing bitterly. 'Don't cry,' he said, 'don't cry, mammy.'

I'll soon have a dad now. Uncle Bill has nearly found him. I think he has gone to fetch him. He'll be coming back by-and-by.'

Miss Langton was well familiar with the sad story of Ellen's sailor-husband, and seeing now that the turn the conversation had taken was causing her pain, she said :

'Tell us about this Uncle Bill, Paul. Your mother, I know, will like to hear that. Who is he? and what has he been doing with you all this time?'

'I don't think I know who he is,' replied Paul, 'except that he is my dear Uncle Bill. I love him, and he loves me, oh, very much! I don't think even my dad will love me better than Uncle Bill does. He says I'm his little Wayside Snowdrop. I asked him once why he called me so. He said I was *Wayside* because he'd picked me up by the way, just as I used to pick up the wild flowers before the snow came; and he said I was *Snowdrop* because I had done what the snowdrops do. I had brought him the promise of a glad spring after a long winter of sorrow. I don't know what he meant. He said he didn't think he quite knew himself; but I was his Wayside Snowdrop, and he always calls me so. Do you think my dear dad will call me Snowdrop?'

Ellen's answer was stifled by a sob, and Paul continued :

'I think I know what Uncle Bill means by a long winter of sorrow. He means his trouble. He has had a great deal. He has often told me about it. He left something he loves very much, but I never could quite make out what it was, and he went to sea in a big, big ship. And one night, when it was very dark, the ship caught fire, and she burned and burned, no one could put it out; and there was gunpowder on board, and, you know, if *one* spark of fire had reached that, the ship would have been blown to pieces, and everybody killed. So, in a great fright, they all rushed to the boats, and they sailed off and left her. There were six boats in all. They kept quite close together. They rowed a great way off, and then they stopped and they looked back. The ship was all in a blaze. Soon they heard a terrible noise, like thunder. It was the gunpowder. Then the great blaze went out altogether, and they knew that the poor ship had gone down quite to the bottom of the ocean.'

Paul paused here with his brown eyes full of tears ; for whenever Uncle Bill had talked about his ship, he had, sailor-like, designated her as 'she,' and the boy in consequence had conceived the idea that something more important than wood, and iron, and rope, and sail-cloth went to form the life of that ill-fated vessel, and all his sympathies were accordingly aroused. Miss Langton and little Ethel were both listening with interest, and the former now observed :

'Why, this Uncle Bill must be the poor sailor whom I talked to in the park the very evening Paul was lost. The history is certainly the same, for I wrote it down on reaching home, intending to make a little story out of it for Miss Ethel's amusement. I wonder what I did with the manuscript? I believe it is in my desk upstairs. I will go and see if I can find it. You would like to read it, Ellen, would you not?'

Miss Langton thereupon arose from her chair and left the room without waiting for an answer. It was as well she did so, for Ellen was too agitated to give one ; too agitated, indeed, to pay attention to anyone or anything but little Paul.

'Go on, dear,' she said, with feverish haste ; 'the boats—what became of the six boats?'

'Oh,' cried Paul, 'a terrible storm came on after that. The wind blew and roared, the lightning flashed, the waves jumped up everywhere, and in the morning, when light came, there was only *one* little boat to be seen. The rest were gone.'

'And this Uncle Bill was in that one boat?' cried Ellen, clutching his shoulders nervously ; 'what happened to it, love?'

'Dreadful things,' replied Paul, his little face growing very grave. 'It was knocked about on the waters for almost three weeks, till all the food and water the poor sailors had were gone, and they were so hungry that they tried to eat their boots, and so thirsty they thought they would die. And they *did* die. They all died but Uncle Bill. And he was nearly dead too, when the boat was washed on shore, and he had just strength enough to crawl out and find his way to a stream, and save his life. Wasn't that a good thing?'

'And what then, love?' asked Ellen eagerly, taking no notice of the question ; 'what then?'

'Oh,' he replied, 'all kinds of things happened then. But



you must ask Uncle Bill to tell you all about them, for I can't remember. All I know is, that when he was strong enough to look about him, he found himself on a *barbarous coast*. I don't know what kind of a place that is, except that it's a very nasty one—oh, very nasty indeed! Uncle Bill didn't like it at all. He tried all he could to get away from it, but he couldn't. There were no railways there, and no cabs or omnibuses, nothing at all, not even a donkey-cart. So he had to stay there for a very long time; years, I think, but I don't know how many. At last he saw a ship passing. It came quite near that coast, and Uncle Bill made signals to the sailors, and they sent a little boat for him, and took him safe on board. Wasn't he just glad! Well, they took him with them to a country called San Francisco. That's a very fine place. There are plenty of ships, and railways, and trams, and everything there. Uncle Bill could soon have got away home, if he hadn't slipped down the hold of the vessel one night, and broke his leg so bad that he had to be carried to the hospital to get it mended and made all right. It took a long time to mend, did that leg, for it was broke very bad indeed. At last it was strong enough for him to walk about. And then some kind gentlemen, who heard his story and thought it very fine, paid his passage for him all the way to England, because he wasn't well enough to work it out, as he wanted to do. And so he got back home. And then he met me, and he said he was going a journey, and that he could take me to my dear dad, if I came along with him; so I did. We've had fine times together, Uncle Bill and me. I've made him laugh often, though he was most times a bit sad; because, you see, he hasn't yet found the something he loves so much. We went to an old cottage to look for it. It ought to have been there with an old man. But it wasn't. Now, what do you think it is that Uncle Bill wants to find? Whenever I ask him, he tells me it's a flower; but I don't think so. Why should he take so much trouble over a flower? I think it's a woman he wants to find; his mother, or p'raps his sister, don't you?

Again the question was left unanswered.

'Did—did—did you ever hear the name of that burning ship, my child?' gasped poor Ellen.

'Yes,' he replied, 'she was called the *Henry James*. But

what's the matter, mammy?—you've gone so white, and you're all trembling as you hold me—what is it?

'This Uncle Bill,' was the hoarse reply, 'the only one saved—the *only one*. Is the Lord going to answer my other prayer, too? Oh! *dare* I hope? Paul, my sweet boy, my darling baby! oh, Paul, Paul! who is this Uncle Bill? What is *his* name?'

'I don't think he has any name but Uncle Bill,' said Paul. 'He never told me he'd any other. But he's very good and kind, that's what he is. And I love him very much. And he's gone to fetch me my dear dad. Hark! that's his step. He's got back! He's coming to us!'

The door, that was standing ajar, was pushed open just then, and Miss Langton came in looking flushed, and as if something unusual had occurred.

'Be calm, my good girl!' she said, as she met Ellen's wild eyes; 'now be calm, and we will break this wonderful, wonderful news to you as quietly as we can. Good news—you hear, Ellen—*good* news is sometimes better given in small doses like—Dear me! how very agitated the poor girl is! What shall I do? How I wish Mrs. Dunraven were at home!'

The good lady was greatly perplexed, and began to think of sal-volatile, smelling-salts, and other restoratives; for Ellen's state was indeed painful to witness. She could only sit white and powerless, her eyes fixed on the opened door. It was little Paul who terminated the suspense. He had caught sight of Uncle Bill, leaning for support all trembling against the corridor wall, and running to him he caught his hand and dragged him within view, crying:

'Come and look at my mammy.'

Another second, and with a smothered sob, the long-parted husband and wife were in each other's arms. Paul and Ethel looked on in amazement; but Miss Langton did not give them time to express their wondering thoughts, for with kind consideration she drew them quietly from the room and closed the door. Outside they found Ned, who told them how Uncle Bill, doubtless through his great agitation, had somehow missed his way, and been roaming from road to road, and had only just been able to get back to the cottage; and how Polly had brought him down to The

Towers at once, and told him, as they walked along, how Paul had already been sent for, and why. And then Paul was told how Uncle Bill had indeed brought his dear dad back with him—though not in the way that he had expected. He looked very grave at first—indeed a little indignant.

‘So Uncle Bill is my dad after all,’ he said, after thinking the matter over; ‘but why didn’t he tell me so long ago? I should like to go and ask him.’ And in about half an hour he was allowed to go.

He returned to the room where his father and mother were sitting hand-in-hand, and he crept quietly towards them, and standing between Uncle Bill’s knees he asked:

‘Uncle Bill, that evening I met you in the park, why did you tell me you would try to put me *right into my dad’s arms*.’

And Uncle Bill opened his arms wide and clasped him to his bosom while he cried:

‘Because it was the truth, my boy, my precious little son! The good Lord forgive me, I didn’t know it then; but it was no lie after all—it was the truth, the pure truth! Look up, Paul! Won’t Uncle Bill do for your dad? you’ll want no other now, will you?’

Paul’s reply was to unbutton his little jacket and blue shirt. Then he took his half-crown from his neck, and climbing on to Uncle Bill’s knee, he put the string over his head. ‘I’ve kept it a very long time for you,’ he said as he did so; ‘mind you don’t lose it!’

Uncle Bill *never* did.

‘And,’ added Paul, ‘I’m sorry the snowdrops haven’t come yet; but as soon as ever they do, I’ll get you a whole bunch.’ And as Uncle Bill covered him with kisses he murmured:

‘Ah, Snowdrop! Snowdrop! My little Wayside Snowdrop! didn’t I name you right after all? Didn’t you prove a wayside snowdrop to me? When you came to your hungry weary daddy with the loaf in your little hands, didn’t your sweet brown eyes whisper of a cruel winter all but over, and a great spring of joy close at hand? I didn’t know then why I felt as if I couldn’t leave those eyes behind me, why I wanted them by my side to look at always. I put myself off with first one reason and then another; but I know the true one now—the real one now. Look, Nell—look here!

The boy has got your eyes, dear wife—our boy has got *your* eyes.'

'Is my mammy your wife?' asked Paul. He had no need to wait for an answer.

'Yes,' was written plainly on every feature of Uncle Bill's tearful, smiling face.

'Uncle Bill,' he said presently, 'I knew all along I was right.'

'What is it, old fellow?'

'Why the day we went to the old cottage, the cottage to let—do you remember?'

'Ay, do I!'

'Well, it wasn't a flower you were after at all. It *was* a woman, and I believe it was my mammy; but you might have told me so.'

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## CHAPTER XXI.

'The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.'—  
JOSHUA xxiv. 24.

OH, what a joyful day was that on which Uncle Bill (as we like best to call him) found himself seated with his wife and little son in the third-class carriage of an express train returning to their City home! He had not been wrong, and heartily he thanked God for it, when he had told Paul that he believed he would soon want every penny he had managed to put by, as they had strolled along. With his wife and boy to provide a comfortable home for, in spite of all his economy and self-denial, he would have found himself but badly off had not Nelly been able to increase his store by the addition of many a bright golden coin.

'I haven't been idle all these years,' she had said, as with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes she handed him the bag containing her little hoard. 'And I have never spent a halfpenny more than I could help; for I always felt somehow that in the Lord's good time I should find my baby, and I knew I should want all my savings then. What made me hope I should ever find the dear child? Is that what you ask me, love? Well, I don't know. For one thing, I kept

on asking the good Lord's help, and the Holy Book told me every time I opened it that none ever cried to *Him* in vain. And for another thing, I had left my lamb with Charlie; and I knew he would take good care of it. Charlie is such a dear lad! I'm longing to see you shake hands with him. Oh, how his face beamed up the day mistress took me to see him! I looked at him dazed like for a while, trying to find a trace of my little thin white boy in the fine strapping young fellow before me. But he knew me in a minute. "Nell," he screamed, and he'd his two arms round my neck; and then—and then—well, then we both sat down and cried for our lost boy; and mistress, dear good lady as she is, tried her best to comfort us both, and make us hopeful. That's only two months or so ago. And now Charlie and I are going to see each other again. There'll be no crying this time. All will be joy—great joy. Hasn't the Lord been good? He's given me more than I have dared to ask for of late, for the years were beginning to be many, love. And I've thought much this last one or two, of something Charlie tried to show me the very night I went out and left him and our boy for good, as it turned out. "Nell," says he, "of course we all know that the great God can do *everything*; but there's something that I don't believe He would ever do, not if you spent five hundred years over praying for it, and that is—*send a drowned man home, to no matter who.*" I wouldn't listen to him then; but of late the years have felt very long, and I was beginning to think much of those words of Charlie's. And after all, here you are sitting safe and sound at my side, and it is really your hand that I'm holding in mine. But tell me, William—for you've never told me yet—why did you take all these weeks to come to me? When you once got to England why didn't you fly to me, instead of taking all those days to walk through county after county as you did?

'I'd have flown to you fast enough, if I'd been certain of finding you,' he had replied; 'but I wasn't—far from it. The years, as you say, had been so long. And then I'd written many a letter to you while I was laid up with my broken leg, but they all came back to me. And thinks I, "If *they* can't find her, can I look for much better luck?" I was a long time making up my mind whether to come to England

at all. I got fancying all kinds of terrible things as I lay on my sick-bed, and I grew afraid—mighty afraid, of finding out they were all true. That's why, when I *did* come, I thought I'd tramp down to the old cottage instead of coming by rail in a few hours as I might have done. Thinks I, I'll put off the evil day as long as I can, for nothing but an evil day for *me* did I expect it to turn out. Ah, if I'd only known that the little brown-eyed chap trotting beside me was my own lad, what a difference it would have made! but such a thought never entered my head; and that is not to be wondered at, seeing that he came into the world while I was far away, and that I'd never even heard that I was a daddy at all. Well, we got to the cottage at last, and you know all about it; for I've told you many a time. How I flew to the old churchyard, and though I thanked the Lord I didn't find you *there*, I thought I should lose my reason entirely; for where, as I asked myself, could you be? Then I heard the sweet truth at the village inn that very same night. How that you were still Ellen Erringford, and had never been anybody else and were never like to, though you had every right to think me dead and gone; and how you were in service down at Dunnersbridge. I thought I should have lost my reason again, but with joy that time. I was ready then to come flying to you—flying as if I'd all the bird's wings in creation. But my pocket was getting lighter than I liked, and thinks I, "I'll save my shillings—I'll want them for her—and I'll trust to my legs again." They are pretty smart legs are mine. I've known them some years now, and I always found them uncommon smart; but they were out of it that time. What with the road being altogether strange, and trying to take short cuts for the nearest, I seemed to walk round, and round, and round. Thinks I, "Fate is still against me! I'll never find this Dunnersbridge;" and certainly no two people I met on the way told me it lay in the same place, and heaps that I asked had never even heard of it. I walked early and late, and certain sure I feel, I walked miles I needn't. Then came the time that me and Paul were all but lost in the snow, and that good Ned saved us—and you know all the rest.'

It was dusk before they arrived at their destination, and

walked down the quiet street where old Mrs. Vogan and Charlie lived. Their coming had been announced that morning by letter, and very extensive preparations had been made to welcome them, even to the buying of a new cap for granny, and the putting on of Charlie's Sunday coat. Charlie, indeed, would have been at the station to meet them, if the roasting of a couple of ducks—bought alive at the market late on Saturday night and fattened for the purpose—had not kept him at home.

The days when good old Mrs. Vogan could step briskly about her little household duties were over for ever now ; and Charlie had to do all their simple cooking. He was on the look-out for his visitors, and the door was opened before they had time to knock, and, with something very like a sob, he caught Paul in his arms. How he hugged and kissed him, and held him at arm's length and looked at him—as though to make quite sure that it was the child himself, and not another lad, that they were trying to foist upon him—and then kissed him and hugged him again till Paul began to laugh. And then Charlie laughed—laughed aloud, while his eyes shone moist with his great joy. Then he carried him to granny, and placed him in her arms, still keeping a tight hold of one little hand, as if there was really some fear of his taking wings and flying off again ; and he whispered in trembling tones that there was no mistake—none at all ! It was really their own little Paul—the light of their eyes, the very sun of their life—come back once more ! And while Mrs. Vogan alternately chuckled and cried, and intermingled terms of endearment with broken words of praise and thanksgiving, Uncle Bill and Nelly stood looking on—affected even to tears.

Uncle Bill was the first to move. Closing the door that had been left standing wide open, he drew a chair forward for his wife, and, advancing to Charlie, held out his hand, saying :

‘I owe this dear old woman and you, my fine young fellow, more than I can ever repay for the love and care you’ve given my little son all these years. I never can thank you. *Thank* is such a poor word to express all I feel. But let us shake hands. I’m longing to feel your honest fist in mine. I’ve—— What ! you won’t ?’

Charlie was standing his full height, looking suspiciously, indignantly, upon him.

'Why, Charlie love!' cried Nelly, hastening forward and laying her hand on her husband's shoulder, 'this is my William! My dear William that Mr. Courtney told you all about a week ago! *Didn't* he tell you all about him? Mistress certainly told me he had. You must have forgotten, dear?'

'Why, Charlie, that's my dear dad!' cried Paul from his granny's knee. 'Shake hands with him, quick. He's a splendid dad!'

Charlie looked undecided. He scratched his head, by way of expressing sundry misgivings; then he looked at Uncle Bill's outstretched hand, then at his own. This latter he rubbed on his coat two or three times, examining it each time carefully back and front; finally he held it out, saying:

'Well, I suppose if I don't you'll all be down on me pretty stiff, so I'll make the best of it. It's about all I can do! But it's a mighty disappointment.'

'What's a disappointment?' they all asked in surprise.

'Why,' he said, 'my only bit of comfort all these dreadful, dreary weeks has been in planning out all I was going to do to the rascally villain that had dared to steal my Paul from me; for it was plain enough to me all along that *some one* had carried him off, else, of course, he'd have come back home safe enough! Oh, what wasn't I going to do to that *some one*! Beat him into powder! smash him, dash him, crash him up—bones and all! till there wasn't as much left of him as would go into granny's brass thimble!'

And Charlie exemplified all the damage his wrath was capable of effecting by pulling off his coat and baring his strong arms. He made one or two feints in the air, and then, finding it impossible to restrain his excited feelings, he caught up granny's old sofa pillow and thumped it to his heart's content. A merry laugh from Paul aroused him to a sense of his folly. He joined in the laugh, threw down the pillow, and put on his coat.

'You've not said a word to *me* yet,' said Nelly reproachfully. 'I shall think you are not glad to see me directly.'



His answer was to throw his arms round her neck and give her a hug and a kiss.

'Come, come, now!' said Uncle Bill; 'after that you *must* shake hands with me, or I shall quarrel in real earnest. Come, don't hang back any longer—though I think none the worse of you for seeing how you served yonder pillow. It shows me the kind of guardian my Paul has had all this time. I shouldn't have carried him off, without a consideration as to who he might be leaving behind, if I'd known all I know now. But you must forgive me. I was a careless, thoughtless chap then—not given to think of much but what happened to fall in with my likes. However, that's all gone by. I'm a different man now—though it's only a few weeks ago. Come, shake hands. It was my own lad I took off with me after all; and I'd a bit of a right to him, hadn't I?'

'Ay,' replied Charlie, 'to be sure you had; 'specially as you'd been without him so long, and hadn't his mammy—dear Nell here—neither. But oh, what a way we were in! Shall I ever forget that night? And every day made it worse. It was awful to have him gone, and not know the least bit in the world what had become of him. However, all's well that end's well. The trouble is all gone. We'll have nothing but the joy now. I'm sure your long journey has made you tired and hungry. The ducks are done to a turn, and all's ready. Let's have some tea. Oh yes! I'll shake hands. Of course I will; why shouldn't I? There—and there! We ought to be good friends—of course we ought—and *must*. And we are, certainly. But it's a mighty disappointment.'

With that, and many a grave shake of the head, Charlie proceeded to busy himself with making the final preparations for the evening meal, while Uncle Bill and Nelly turned to address some kind words to old Mrs. Vogan. Time was pressing very heavily upon poor old granny now. It was in vain they tried to thank her for all the love and kindness she had so freely given to their little son during the years of his great need. She could not enter into what they were saying, nor did she appear to understand who they were, and why they talked to her of gratitude and thanks; and finding that all their attempts at explanation only bewildered her,

they contented themselves with stroking her withered hands caressingly, and assuring her that hers should always be the honoured place in their little household. It always was.

'You're looking very grave, Charlie ; what are you thinking about ?' asked Nelly later on in the evening, when granny was dozing in her rocking-chair, and Paul was fast asleep in his father's arms.

They had had so much to talk about, so many adventures to relate, the one to the other, that conversation had been briskly kept up during the hour they had been sitting round the fire, and it was after the first pause that Nelly made the preceding remark.

'I was wondering if I was asleep, or wide awake after all,' he replied in answer ; 'so many strange things have happened of late that I shouldn't be very much surprised if it didn't turn out to be nothing but a dream. All seems too good to be true.'

Nelly put out her hand and laid it on the little curly head resting against her husband's shoulder.

'Here's sound proof that *this* is no dream,' she remarked with a quiet smile.

'And here's sound proof that *this* is no dream,' murmured Uncle Bill, bending his head until his lips touched her hand.

'Yes,' said Charlie ; 'Paul and Nelly are there, true enough. It isn't them I find it so difficult to believe in. As for Nell, if it wasn't that her face is rosy and happy looking, and if you'd a bit of an odd-shaped bundle in an old red shawl in your arms instead of that big lad, bless him ! I'd think the whole five years that have slipped by since that last night in O'Brian's Court just a dream, and nothing more. It's *you* that I can't get my mind quite clear about. When I look at you sitting there, I say to myself : "It's him—it's *him*. Oh yes ! there's no manner of anything like a mistake ; it's *him*." But for all that, I don't seem to get a bit nearer *feeling* it's you.' And turning to Nelly, he continued : 'You were right, Nell, after all. In spite of all the gentlefolks said at that shipping-office, you would keep on praying to the good Lord to send your William home to you ; and look, there he is. And I was right, too. Drowned men never come home. The Lord won't let them. Of course He

could, if He chose. He can do everything ; but He never would do that. No one in their senses would ask Him to do such a thing. But then your William *wasn't* drowned. Not he ! There he is ! Bless us all ! but it *is* strange, too. Why,' he added, addressing Uncle Bill, 'the hours we've talked about you ! You wouldn't believe *one* man could get talked about half as much as we used to talk about you. Your name was never out of Nelly's lips five minutes together. The very night she went off and got lost in the river, she'd been telling me about the night you sailed—how you went by an old church, and the bells rang out and——'

'Seemed to be calling us in to ask for a blessing,' interrupted Uncle Bill, turning to his wife with a fond smile. 'Do you remember telling me that, Nell ? And do you remember how you tried to get me in—just for ten minutes, as you said ? And do you remember how I laughed, and said I was well pleased to have a good little saint for my wife ; but that churches, and parsons, and such like had naught to do with knock-about fellows like me ?'

'I remember,' replied Nelly, and her eyes glistened bright in the firelight as she spoke. 'We passed on, you and I—we took a turn down the gay streets instead, and we left the "blessing" behind us. Many a time, Will, love, have I reproached myself sore that I wasn't more firm in persuading you ; for I might have got you in if I'd stuck to it more ; and who knows the good it might have done us both ?'

'It would have done *me* no good,' was Uncle Bill's reply. 'All the preaching and praying in the world would have done me no good that night. You've seen dew roll off a cabbage-leaf, Nell. That's just the way every warning and promise, and truth, of the precious gospel used to roll off my heart in those days. Not a bit would sink in, like. I knew it all. I knew all the warnings, and all the promises, and all the truths off by heart. I could have told them all to anyone that had asked me about them. I hadn't been sent to Sunday-school, when I was a small chap, year after year, for nothing. There wasn't much in the holy Bible that I hadn't heard one time or another. But it had done me no good. It had all rolled off ; it wouldn't sink in. Of late, in thinking matters over, it's struck me that my stubborn old heart was like the hard stony ground the good Lord speaks

of somewhere in His blessed Word. I'm not much of a farmer, but I know, if you want seed to take root, you must hack and cut and tear away the ground before you put it in. That's just the way it was with me, I take it. Good seed had been thrown on my heart pretty near all my life ; but it couldn't take root till all the carelessness, and faithlessness, and thoughtlessness, and coldness, and hardness that covered it tight as a tortoise's shell, was hacked at, and cut at, and torn away. I think they are pretty well torn away now. I hope so. What I've gone through all these five long weary years may have helped to do it. I believe it has. But do you know what finished it ? Do you know whom the good Lord sent to do the work that many of His servants, and your sweet self included, had tried to do in vain ?

And then in a low voice he told how little Paul had taught him to pray.

'He got that from blind Susie,' observed Charlie, when the account was concluded, and Nelly was hiding her tears of joy in Paul's curls. 'I did my best for him, but I couldn't teach him what I didn't know myself. Nelly tried to show me a deal of the good Lord in the old days. But I was mighty ignorant then, and didn't seem to catch hold of it at all. The best I could do was to stick fast to the first bit of a prayer she managed to teach me. I taught it to Paul as soon as he could speak. That was all I could do for him. Blind Susie did the rest, for she's been well taught. So have I now, for that matter. Folks may scoff as they like ; and scoff, I believe, they always did, and scoff, I suppose, they always will. I don't care. Let them scoff ! I believe what Mr. Courtney, our kind minister, tells me. The dear Lord Jesus died to save us ; and it's real mean, to my mind, to be making no account of His sufferings and goodness, and to live year after year spending our days in serving the devil instead of Him. And it's an awful risk, too, when we think of it. The holy Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Heaven. We *must* die, each one of us, *some day* ; and we all hope, bad and good, to go to heaven. Woe betide us if we hear the great King cry, "Depart from Me ; I never knew you." The good Lord preserve us ! How awful ! No ; let them scoff ! Mr. Courtney is right. No man, old or young, rich or poor, is so happy and safe as the one that

can say, "As for me . . . I will serve the Lord," and shows the world that he means to do it'

And Uncle Bill and Nelly uttered a fervent 'Amen.'

What remains to be told? Of course, the first thing next morning, Paul ran off to see his dear little blind friend. And didn't they kiss each other? and didn't Susie cry for joy? and didn't she clasp her tiny arms round his neck, as if she would never let him go again? And hadn't they lots to talk about? And weren't Bridget and Tom delighted to see him? And wasn't Paul's triumph complete when he made his dad kneel down by Susie's side and put her thin little hands on his great shoulders, and bid her feel how big he was, and what splendid whiskers he had? And didn't he 'show him up' to Billy Blake, and Robbie, and Jack, and all of them? And didn't he ever after declare that there wasn't a dad about as fine and as strong as his? And, through Mr. Courtney's kindness, didn't Uncle Bill get work, and earn sufficient money to be able to take a house large enough for faithful granny, and Charlie, and himself, and his wife and boy, all to live together? And didn't Nelly take good care of dear old granny? And were they not all as happy as they could be? And wasn't Paul taken to the grey church with the railings, and didn't the good minister christen him? And wasn't Charlie made one of his godfathers? And didn't Miss Ethel insist upon being his only godmother? And didn't she say she intended to be a friend to him and blind Susie as long as she lived? And didn't Mrs. Dunraven and Miss Langton say they hoped God would bless him? And didn't they mean it? And didn't Tom and Bridget kiss him, and say he was worth all the world to them for their little blind maid's sake? And didn't a joyful smile light up the sweet face of that same little blind maid as she whispered in his ear, 'Now, Paul, we've both been christened quite alike?' And didn't the old sexton shake hands with him and ask him what his name was? and didn't he reply proudly, 'Paul Erringford, and folks call my mammy Mrs. Erringford, and William Erringford is my dear dad?' And when he heard all the clever things that Susie was learning at her school, didn't he say he thought it was time for him to go to one too? And

didn't he often wonder why it was that Susie was learning to read with her fingers, while he picked out his letters with his bright brown eyes? And didn't he look at those thin little white fingers in astonishment the day she read him a chapter from the Bible Miss Ethel had so kindly presented to her? Didn't he examine the curious raised type on the sacred pages, and then cry aloud, 'Susie's a lot cleverer than me. I could *never* make those queer letters out'? And when the days were warm and long, didn't the two little friends often sit side by side and sing and chat together? And the day Polly and Ned sent him a basket of snowdrops by rail, roots and all, didn't he run with some of them to the blind child, and bid her feel the long green leaves and white tender petals, and, sitting at her feet, try his hardest to explain why Uncle Bill, his 'dear dad,' had loved to call him during the days of their wandering,

'A WAYSIDE SNOWDROP?'

THE END.



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